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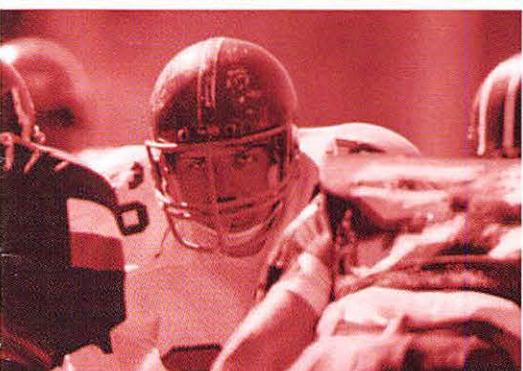
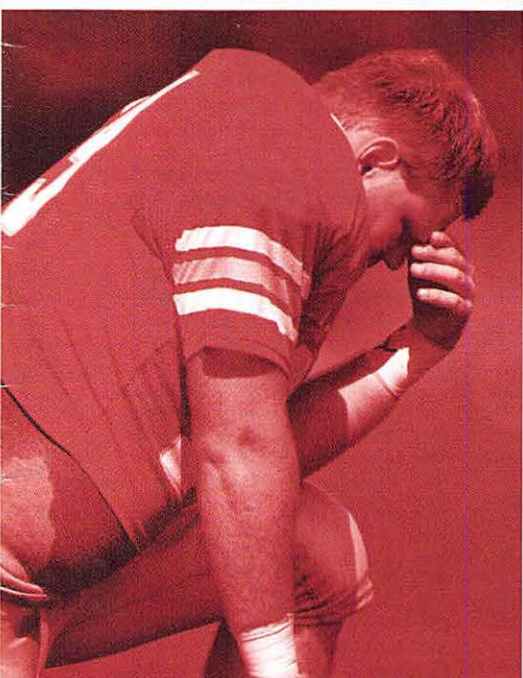
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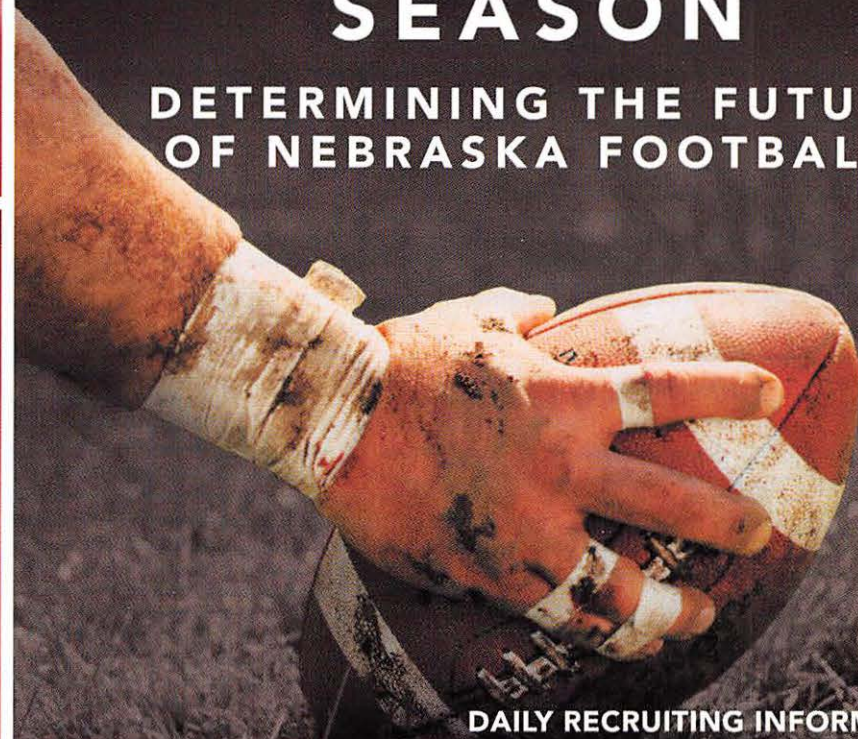
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THE ONLINE LEADER IN COLLEGE SPORTS

New Energy

Staff changes could provide the spark to turn things around in 2003



Brian Hill

A FORMER co-worker used to suggest that I give him a kick in the rear to get him going when he was struggling with a project.

Although most of us wouldn't admit it as candidly as he did, there are times when we all could use a swift kick to get us moving.

The reality of a 7-7 season and the resulting changes could provide that kick to jump-start the Nebraska football program, which finished with its worst record in 41 years.

As this edition goes to press, Coach Frank Solich is apparently putting the finishing touches on a revamped coaching staff that will bring new ideas and push different buttons for a program that looked tired just one year after playing for a national championship.

The first piece of that puzzle was put in place when Solich announced the hiring of Green Bay linebacker coach Bo Pelini as defensive coordinator as the Huskers arrived in Shreveport, La., for the Independence Bowl. Several other new faces will be in place when spring practice begins.

Pelini has never served as a defensive coordinator, but he has been an NFL assistant for nine years with San Francisco, New England and Green Bay.

ON THE COVER

Nebraska Coach Frank Solich makes his point to an official after a flag was thrown for pass interference, but then waved off, in the fourth quarter of the Independence Bowl Dec. 27. Steve Pederson (inset) was introduced as the new athletic director Dec. 20. *Photos by Shane Bevel, Shreveport Times, and Scott Bruhn, Huskers Illustrated*

The hiring was a popular one.

So was the one just three days earlier, when University Chancellor Harvey Perlman announced that Steve Pederson was returning to Nebraska to replace Bill Byrne as athletic director.

The North Platte native, Nebraska graduate and former Husker recruiting coordinator, associate athletic director and director of football operations had moved on to Pittsburgh as athletic director in 1996. He led a resurgence in the Pittsburgh athletics program and

hired several successful coaches, including football coach Walt Harris.

"Being able to join forces with him to build something special has been tremendously gratifying," Harris said in a statement. "He was the right man for the right job. He got us to say 'we can' when many people were saying 'we can't.' It is a very special

thing for him to be able to return to his roots and lead the university that gave him his start."

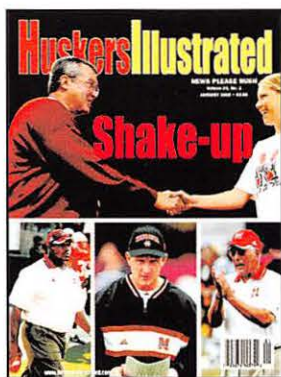
You can read more about Nebraska's new athletic director and some of his thoughts and ideas in this edition of Huskers Illustrated.

We also have a look at Pelini, a recap of Nebraska's 27-23 loss to Mississippi in the Independence Bowl and a look ahead to 2003 focussing on I-back David Horne and cornerback Fabian Washington.

The two true freshmen are among a group of impressive young players who gained valuable experience and provide cause for optimism heading into the 2003 season.

The returning Huskers certainly shouldn't lack for motivation after the disappointment and frustration they experienced in 2002.

That alone should be like a kick in the pants. ■



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Steve Pederson said his new job "is truly a dream come true." *By Mike Babcock*

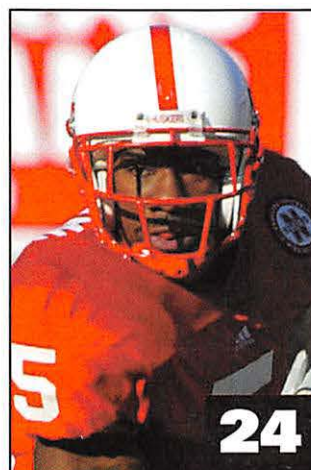
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Nebraska Coach Frank Solich says that his new defensive coordinator Bo Pelini "understands what it's all about."



24 Looking Ahead

It was a learning experience for I-back David Horne (left) and cornerback Fabian Washington, who were thrust into action as true freshmen. *By Mike Babcock*

More Jucos?

Nebraska hasn't recruited many junior college players during Frank Solich's tenure as head coach. The Cornhuskers have brought in only four in the past five years, not counting Rodney Burgess, who transferred from Northwest Mississippi Community College — after playing at Hutchinson, Kan., Community College in 1999 — following the 2001 letter-of-intent signing period.

Nebraska signed Larry Henderson in 1999, Thunder Collins in 2000, Clifford Brye in 2001 and Demorrio Williams in 2002. Williams was a starter at weakside linebacker this season.

The Cornhuskers didn't recruit heavily in junior colleges under Tom Osborne, either, awarding scholarships to only 37 junior college transfers during his 25 years as head coach.

The most junior college transfers Nebraska has taken in one year was four, in 1977. That pattern is likely to change as it looks for immediate help in the wake of its worst season since 1961.

"We've looked at the junior college ranks quite a bit, more so than ever before," Solich said.

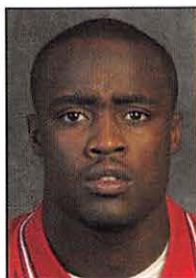
As recruiting went into a late-December dead period, the Cornhuskers were looking at "somewhere around 12 to 15" junior college players, he said. "That does not mean, necessarily, that we'll have 12 to 15 junior college players (in) this class. But we will have a representable number."

Prior to the dead period, two junior college players had made oral commitments to accept scholarships from Nebraska: offensive lineman Darren DeLone and rush end Wali Muhammad.

"There are some positions that show an immediate need to get some guys in here," said Solich.

Three of the top four rush ends were seniors, as were four of the top five tight ends.

The Cornhuskers also were interested in a junior college quarterback, with redshirted freshman Curt Dukes likely to miss spring practice following knee surgery. As a result, "this



Demorrio Williams



Mike Rozier

will be an extremely important year for us in terms of the quarterback position in recruitment," Solich said.

Typically, junior college transfers are expected to contribute right away, as Williams has done. That's particularly difficult for a quarterback, who has so much to learn in a short time.

But "it's done at other programs around the country," said Solich. "I think if you look at it closely, you'll see that there have been quite a few junior college quarterbacks of late that have had a dramatic impact on offenses around the country. And so, in my mind, that can get done."

Iowa State quarterback Seneca Wallace was a good example.

The Big 12's restrictions on academic partial qualifiers — only one per year in football — have contributed to an increased interest in junior college players among conference schools, despite a stereotype that too many junior college transfers can disrupt a team's chemistry.

Solich dismisses that. "Your team chemistry can be disrupted regardless of whether you have junior college players on your team or not," he said. "There are a lot of things that can disrupt it."

Chemistry is based on the players already in the program, Solich said. "The makeup of our football team will be such that they'll demand a lot of things of one another. The makeup of this team will be, they'll want to get things done at the level Nebraska has gotten things done in the past.

"I just see that leading us forward in a manner that you're going to give yourself your best chance to win, whenever you make sure that all the bases are covered as far as position

needs."

Williams, of course, speaks in favor of increased interest in junior college transfers.

"I feel like a juco kid, he can come in and play," said Williams. "I feel like he's going to get himself prepared to step up next season and help this team. I feel like those guys are going to be a big impact because we're losing a lot of key players this year."

"Like I was, I feel like a lot of those guys could step in and play right now."

Nebraska's most famous junior college transfer? Mike Rozier, of course.

Rozier spent one season at Coffeyville, Kan., Community College then transferred to become the Cornhuskers' career-rushing leader and win the Heisman Trophy in 1983.

Nebraska didn't find Rozier in Coffeyville, however. The Cornhuskers sent him there because he didn't meet freshman eligibility requirements out of high school in Camden, N.J.

The problem was a teachers strike during his senior year.

Despite his success at Coffeyville, Rozier remained loyal to Nebraska, honoring his commitment. He rushed for 943 yards his first season as a Cornhusker, following with a school-record 1,648 yards as a junior and then breaking his own record with 2,148 yards as a senior.

His career numbers were 4,780 yards rushing and 52 touchdowns.

He also rushed for 340 yards and scored two touchdowns in three bowl games.

Even though Nebraska has brought in only 41 junior college players on scholarship since 1973, Tom Osborne's first season as head coach, it has been successful with those players.

Counting Demorrio Williams this season, 30 of the 41 transfers have earned letters, and a few have gone on to play in the NFL, among them Rozier, Toby Wright and Henry Waechter. ■

SUPPORTIVE ALUM

Former Cornhusker quarterback Scott Frost helped out on defense as a graduate assistant for the Independence Bowl game. Frost, who was taking graduate classes while rehabilitating a shoulder injury on the Green Bay Packers' injured reserve list, volunteered for the duty.

Frost contacted Coach Frank Solich following the firing of defensive coordinator Craig Bohl and defensive assistants George Darlington and Nelson Barnes to offer his services.

"I care about this program," said Frost. "This program has done so much for me in my life and my family, too. I saw they were short-handed, and I just want to come in and help."

His parents both competed at Nebraska, his father Larry in football and his mom Carol in track and field, before the university sponsored women's athletic teams.

Carol Frost also coached the Husker women's track and field team.

Frost told Solich "anything he could have me do, I'd be willing to come in and do."

"I didn't want to step on any toes, and I told Frank that. I told him I don't want a job here. I want to be able to lend a hand if I can," Frost said. "I want to give back to it (the program)."

Frost was able to fill in as a graduate assistant after Jimmy Burrow and Tim Albin were temporarily promoted to full-time status, which allowed them to go on the road to recruit.

Frost is working toward a master's degree in business administration but hopes to be playing in NFL again next season. His contract with the Packers expires after this season, he said.

Coaching was just a "two-week thing for me," he said. "I'm not really sure what my future holds." However, he might consider coaching "somewhere down the road."

The two weeks would give him "a good idea if this is something I want to pursue."

Three days into his temporary coaching career, he was already exhausted, he said. "I think that MBA might come in handy down the road. These coaches put in long, hard hours."

"I don't think people realize the amount of work they put in."

The players responded well to Frost. "I think they appreciate the fact that he's out here with them," Solich said before the team left for Shreveport. "I think they also appreciate that he volunteered to do it, that it wasn't a deal where anybody had to drag him out here. Scott's got a great attitude."

KNOWS BO

Frost knows Bo Pelini, Nebraska's new defensive coordinator, of course. In certain alignments, he was under the direction of the Packers' linebackers coach.

Prior to the announcement that Pelini would be coming to the Cornhuskers after the Packers' playoff run ends, Frost said, "I don't know much about what his future holds. I know Bo is a great guy and a great coach. If that would happen (coming to Nebraska), I think he'd fit in well here."

"If it isn't here, I think he's got a great future somewhere else. He's definitely one of the vital cogs up there (in Green Bay) on that staff to get the defense ready to play. He knows the game real well, and he's a good teacher. He can be very fiery when he needs to be. But he's pretty even-tempered, too."

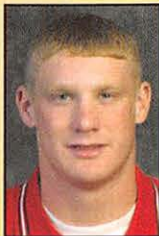
"He's not a yeller and a screamer, but definitely a motivator." ■

QUICK HITS

What's Happening In Nebraska Athletics?

DUKES DOWN

Redshirted freshman quarterback Curt Dukes underwent surgery to have screws inserted in a knee following the regular season. Dukes injured the knee "slightly during the course of the season," said Solich. "But it didn't bother him to a point where there was much swelling in it."



Curt Dukes

However, "as he continued to practice, every now and then it would flare up on him, and as they (doctors) zeroed in on it, they found the problem and completed the surgery."

In all likelihood, Dukes will miss spring practice while rehabilitating the knee.

"You'd like to have him, of course," Solich said. "That will hurt. But on the other side of it, he's already had a spring under his belt, in terms of operating our offense."

"So he's been initiated into it to some degree."

Dukes also practiced with the top units early in the season, before the final decision was made to redshirt him, the week following the Iowa State game.

NOT MUCH ACTION

After being a key participant in one of the most dramatic plays of the 2001 season, Mike Stuntz saw little action as a sophomore back-up to Jammal Lord at quarterback.

He played in only six games, completing 10-of-25 passes for 100 yards and rushing for 13 yards. The bulk of those statistics were compiled against Iowa State. With the Cyclones in control, he played the final 13 minutes, completing 7-of-18 passes for 72 yards and rushing for 13 yards — he season net.

He has accepted the situation philosophically. "This is not YMCA ball," he said. "When we're trying to win games, you can't worry about getting everybody in the game."

He would have benefited from more opportunities in games, however.

"It's completely different in practices and games," he said. "You're playing the same sport (during practice), but the level is something else. I'd be farther along, but I don't feel I've been held back or anything like that. It's just some opportunities I may not have had."

Stuntz played wide receiver as a true freshman, of course, and his 63-yard touchdown pass to Eric Crouch, off a reverse, helped upset Oklahoma and earn Crouch the Heisman Trophy.

Spending a season at wide receiver might have limited his development as a quarterback, but if he hadn't agreed to the temporary position switch, he would have been redshirted and have played on the scout team. Had he remained at quarterback, "it could have gone either way," he said. "If we would have finished things up, won a national title, I don't think I would have had second thoughts."

"But there's no use thinking about anything now that you can't change."

STAYING UP-BEAT

Philip Bland remained positive despite the Cornhuskers' frustrating season. The sophomore rover led the team with 84 tackles during the regular season but missed the Independence Bowl because of injury. "This is humbling game," he said before the team left for Shreveport. "It's a fun game, too. It's not America's greatest game for nothing, that's for sure."

HUSKER CENTURY PART III

The third and final installment of the Husker Century series on the history of Nebraska football, "Spirit of Champions," has been released. The 2 hour, 5 minute video covers 1973 to 2001, the Tom Osborne era through the first four seasons of Frank Solich's tenure as head coach.

It includes game highlights as well as unique behind-the-scenes video, narrated by former Cornhusker Trev Alberts. It also features comments of players, opposing coaches — among them Oklahoma's Barry Switzer — and national media figures, such as television broadcaster Keith Jackson.

The series was co-produced by HuskerVision and Nebraska ETV Network.

FRESHMAN HONORS

Nebraska redshirt freshman offensive tackle Richie Incognito was selected to the Scripps/FWAA Freshman All-America Team.

Incognito led Nebraska in pancakes with 171 during the regular season, the second-best total at Nebraska since the statistic has been tracked beginning in 1995.

Two other Husker freshman received accolades from The Sporting News. Cornerback Fabian Washington was a second-team frosh All-America selection by the publication. ■

Defense First

Although he wasn't Nebraska's first defensive coordinator, McBride defined the position



**Mike
BABCOCK**

DEFENSE WINS championships. Ohio State's double-overtime 31-24 upset of Miami in the Fiesta Bowl game underscored the truth on which that cliché has been based.

The Buckeyes, decided underdogs, gave themselves an opportunity to win by playing defense. Then, with a break from an official's delayed call, they were able to capitalize.

Oklahoma used the same approach to win a national championship two seasons ago, shutting down heavily favored Florida State 13-2 in the Orange Bowl game.

Nebraska last had a championship caliber defense in 1999, when the Blackshirts ranked third in the nation in scoring defense and fourth in total defense.

The Cornhuskers didn't win the title in 1999, of course, because of a 24-20, regular-season loss at Texas. But they would have given national champion Florida State a good go.

That was only three seasons ago. But it seems longer.

Nebraska was nowhere to be found among the national leaders in any significant defensive category this season, in a slide to 7-7 mediocrity that began at Colorado a year ago.

Defense wasn't the only problem. The offense was inconsistent and ineffective at times, too. Without question, significant changes are needed on both sides of the ball.

And Coach Frank Solich has set about making them, defense first.

Step one was the hiring of Mark "Bo" Pelini to coordinate the defense. Pelini, the Green Bay Packers' linebackers coach until a playoff loss to the Atlanta Falcons on the first Saturday in January, replaces Craig Bohl, who was dismissed along with George Darlington and Nelson Barnes on Dec. 2.

Pelini becomes only the fifth coach in Cornhusker history to have the title of defensive coordinator. Bob Devaney never identified coordinators for offense or defense, and neither did the Cornhusker coaches before him. Pre-Devaney coaching staffs were smaller, and not quite as specialized.

So Monte Kiffin was Nebraska's first defensive coordinator, assuming that title in 1973, when Tom Osborne succeeded Devaney as head coach. Kiffin, a Cornhusker defensive tackle in the early 1960s, coordinated the defense for four years before leaving to be an assistant at Arkansas.

He went from Arkansas to North Carolina State, to be the head coach, and then on to the NFL, where he has coordinated some outstanding defenses at Minnesota and Tampa Bay.

Kiffin began as a Cornhusker assistant in 1967, first as a freshman line coach and then succeeding George Kelly as the varsity defensive line coach in 1968. Kiffin, who report-

edly recommended Pelini for the job he first held, was at Nebraska when the Blackshirt tradition began.

Lance Van Zandt succeeded Kiffin as the Cornhuskers' defensive coordinator, coming from Kansas in 1977. Osborne's teams were struggling against Oklahoma and its wishbone offense, and Kansas had upset the Sooners in 1975, with Van Zandt's defense allowing them only three points.

Despite the 23-3 loss, at Norman, Oklahoma won the national title that season.

So Osborne brought in Van Zandt to deal with the wishbone, and Nebraska upset the Sooners in Van Zandt's second season, 1978, again handing them their only loss, 17-14 at Memorial Stadium.

Van Zandt moved on to the NFL's New Orleans Saints after the 1980 season.

The Cornhuskers were without a defensive coordinator for one season, before Charlie McBride, who had replaced Kiffin as the defensive line coach in 1977, was promoted.

McBride defined the position, coordinating the defense for 18 seasons. Nebraska ranked in the nation's top 20 in total defense in 14 of those seasons, including five times in the top five.

In 1984, they ranked first in both total defense and scoring defense.

Despite consistent success that shaped the Blackshirt tradition, McBride weathered his share of criticism to set the lofty standard to which Pelini now will be held.

Even though Bohl became a lightning rod for fan disaffection, the former Cornhusker walk-on did his best to replace a legend in McBride. His dedication and commitment to the program couldn't be questioned, and given time, he might have been able to turn the defense around.

Time is of the essence, however. Patience is in short supply. There is no opportunity to grow into a coordinator's position. Every coach must

deal with a sense of urgency to produce.

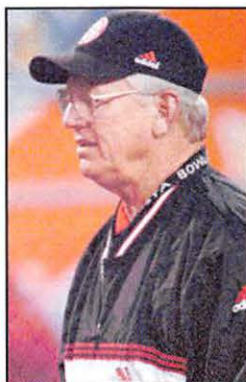
Solich also will identify an offensive coordinator, a responsibility he has handled since taking over for Osborne, who coordinated the offense during his 25 years as head coach.

Devaney turned over the offense to Osborne in 1969, but without the coordinator's title. So, technically, the offensive coordinator Solich hires will be the Cornhuskers' first.

Historically speaking, perhaps, the hiring of an offensive coordinator is more significant. Just two coaches have had the final say in Nebraska's offense over the last 30-plus years.

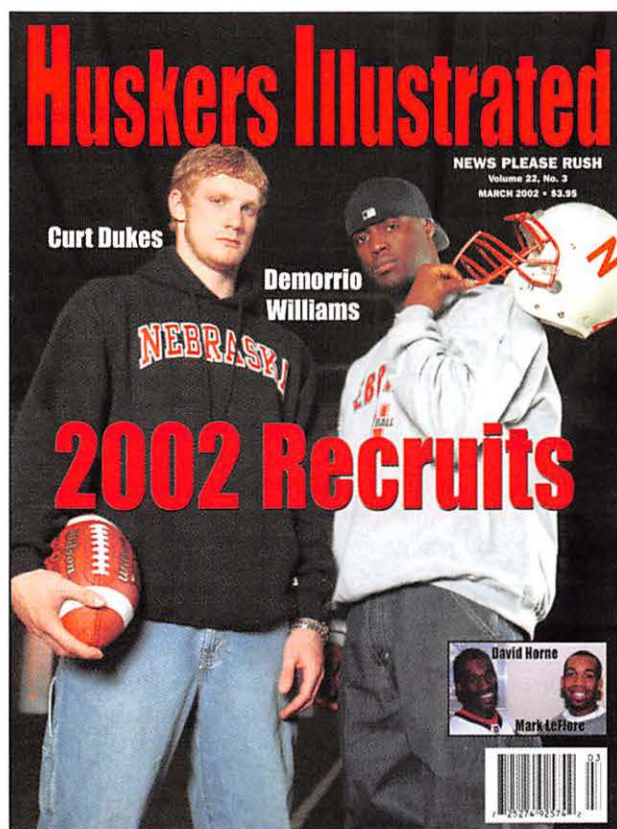
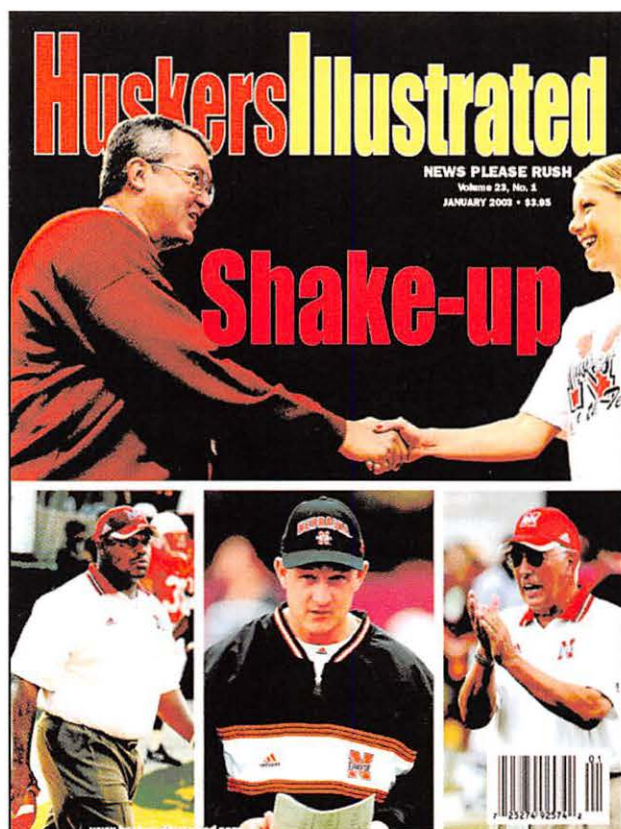
But practically speaking, the hiring of a defensive coordinator is just as significant. If the Cornhuskers are to contend for national titles again . . . well, they'll need defense. Ask Ohio State.

Appropriately enough, that's where Pelini played. ■



**Charlie McBride was
defensive coordinator
for 18 seasons.**

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... On Your Favorite Team

More Air Time?

Nebraska's new offensive coordinator will be expected to inject life into the passing game



Terry DOUGLASS

AFTER A 7-7 SEASON that included one of Nebraska's most anemic offensive performances in recent memory, it appears the winds of change could soon be blowing through the pages of the Cornhuskers' offensive play-book.

Even though the Cornhuskers finished the regular season fourth in the country in rushing offense at 268.9 yards per game, Nebraska's total offensive output was sub-par. The Huskers entered their bowl game ranked 61st nationally in total offense and 10th in the Big 12 Conference, averaging 374.2 yards per game. That figure also marked NU's lowest average output since 1969.

In the most important offensive statistical category — points scored — Nebraska averaged just 27.4 per game, which was the program's lowest since 1976 when it averaged 26.7. The Huskers, who ended the regular season 54th nationally in scoring offense, had finished in the top 10 nationally in that category in all but four seasons since 1970.

Considering its relative success running the football, Nebraska's downfall appeared to be the passing game, which was 110th nationally at 104.4 yards per game. In his first season as starting quarterback, Jammal Lord struggled through the air, completing 46.6 percent (95-of-204) for 1,362 yards with 12 touchdowns with 12 interceptions.

In hopes of re-energizing the offensive attack, Coach Frank Solich removed himself as offensive coordinator after five seasons of calling plays. Although Solich has yet to name a new offensive coordinator, whoever gets the job will be expected to inject life into the passing game.

"We're definitely looking at different ways to throw the ball to try to be an efficient throwing team," Solich said the morning after Nebraska's 27-23 Independence Bowl loss to Mississippi. "I think we're going to have big-play receivers. We'll want to utilize those guys."

That prospect sounds great to freshman split end Mark LeFlore. Despite losing leading receiver Wilson Thomas, the Huskers return split end Ross Pilkington (14 receptions for 301 yards) and tight end Matt Herian (seven receptions, 301 yards and four touchdowns).

LeFlore said the Huskers also have plenty of newcomers in the system who are excellent receivers that "nobody knows about." LeFlore said players like Isaiah Fluellen, walk-on Grant Mulkey and newcomers Andy Birkel and Ronnie Smith could have an immediate impact if Nebraska elects to throw more.

"We have six receivers here that are as good as anybody Nebraska has ever had," LeFlore said. "Usually, they have one or two, but we have six guys that can really get it done."

"I'm not saying we're going to be Florida or Miami with the way we're going to start throwing, but when you have that sort of talent. It would be a crime not to use it."

While Solich has a strong desire for Nebraska to become a more proficient throwing team, his wishes shouldn't be overstated. In other words, don't expect the Huskers to employ the run-and-shoot by next season.

"I don't see us making a living by just dropping back and throwing," Solich said.

Perhaps the person most interested in who the new offensive coordinator will be is Lord. The junior thrived as a runner in Nebraska's current scheme, rushing for a school position record 1,412 yards, and broke 2001 Heisman Trophy winner Eric Crouch's total offense record of 2,625 with 2,774 yards (bowl games now count toward a player's season totals).

"I think Jammal gained very, very valuable experience, which will help him a great deal," Solich said.

Lord is one of five full-time starters expected to return next season. That list includes left tackle Richie Incognito, right tackle Dan Vili Waldrop, left guard Mike Erickson and full-back Judd Davies.

With several other key players like I-back David Horne returning, Solich is optimistic the offense will be improved next season.

"I think we've got the right combination of things with the type of young receivers that we have in the program coming back," Solich said. "I think that we'll be more experienced in the offensive line, and we didn't come as far as I had expected our line to come."

Actually, Solich's quest for a better passing game started prior to the season, as members of the coaching staff visited the San Francisco 49ers to review the team's ball-control passing game. Former Husker fullback and 49er Tom Rathman is now the NFL club's running back coach.

"You look at San Francisco, and they're very much a controlled passing team," Solich said.

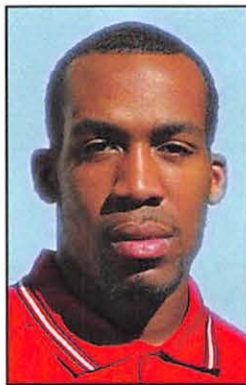
"They'll dump it off to the back a lot, and they'll have routes based off different formations that are virtually the same kind of routes, so they get a lot of repetition on them. They do a great job at what they're doing."

While Solich is not opposed to throwing more, he maintains that Nebraska must be efficient in the passing game. After all, incomplete passes are equal to running plays that gain nothing.

After leading the country in rushing during two of Solich's five seasons as head coach, it's apparent that Nebraska will still hang its hat on the ground game.

"You'd better do something really well and we're not going to be a great drop-back throwing team, so you'd better run the football well," Solich said. "And then, you'd better build off of that with play-action passes and have a mixture of some other throws to help you get some things done."

"That's what we'll be after in our approach next year. That's the kind of personnel we have on our football team." ■



Split end Mark LeFlore says the Huskers have quality receivers.

Terry Douglass is the sports editor of the Grand Island Independent. He can be reached at tdbddouglass@netzero.net.

No Margin For Error

Solich says a lot of things went awry, and the decisions come back to him



Curt McKEEVER

MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL, what should we make of the Huskers' fall?

From the time of Nebraska's loss at Iowa State in this season's Big 12 Conference opener, that question has been asked repeatedly by NU fans. And while I've yet to hear a definitive answer, there's good news.

No one has reported any mirrors cracking over Nebraska's 7-7 season.

"These days, there is a thin line that separates a program from getting it done or not getting it done," said Coach Frank Solich, who has a sparkling 49-16 record in five seasons, but is stuck with the reality that over the last 16 games that Huskers are just 7-9. "I think this season just re-emphasizes that everything in your program has to be hitting on all cylinders. There is no margin for error in college football right now."

That's why Solich felt compelled to make changes among his staff. He hired Green Bay Packers linebackers coach Bo Pelini to coordinate a defense that lacked luster under Craig Bohl. He courted outsiders like Kansas State's passing game coordinator Greg Peterson and New Mexico State assistant Barney Cotton to be his replacement as offensive coordinator.

And with national letter of intent signing day around the corner, Solich was moving without haste.

"The other day, a father of a recruit asked me, 'What should we be looking at, Nebraska's tradition or who'll be coaching there next season?'" said offensive line coach Dan Young, who was mulling retirement after 20 years with the Huskers. "Most players seem to accept that we'll hire good people and that our winning tradition will continue."

Count former Husker quarterback Mickey Joseph among the believers.

"They have the talent, said Joseph, now quarterbacks coach at Division I-AA Nichols (La.) State. "Look at their quarterback, Jammal Lord. He had a great season and now will have experience. With another good class of recruits, I think they'll bounce back next year."

Judging from their looks after the 27-23 loss to Mississippi in the Independence Bowl, a lot of Huskers could have understandably been looking to clearing their minds before regrouping for next season.

My top candidate for some R&R time would have been fullback Judd Davies. As smart a Husker as you'll meet, Davies had the misfortune of being given an option to call for a pass out of a punting formation at a key moment in the game.

It turned into as big a faux pas as you'll see.

Nebraska was leading 20-17 late in the third quarter, and though the Rebels' quarterback Eli Manning was starting to heat up, he'd still only been able to direct them to one sustained touchdown drive. Their other had been set up by a long interception return.

So here were the Huskers, facing fourth-and-12 from their

35. Let Kyle Larson punt and you figure Ole Miss has a country mile left to paydirt.

Instead, Davies — inserted at the interior protective position behind center only because Steve Kriewald had to move up to replace an ill Scott Shanle — audibled and threw an incomplete pass to Marques Simmons. Four plays later, Toward Sanford bulled his way over the goal line, Ole Miss had its first lead of the afternoon, and the Huskers never regained it.

"That was putting (the defense) in a tough position. We gave them the short field," Solich said. But "all these decisions come back to me. There's no good answer for (why the play didn't work), other than it did not work."

"It Did Not Work" would be a fitting title for Nebraska's 2002 season.

"There's a lot of things that went awry this year," Solich said of the first non-winning campaign in 41 years . . . We are where we're at."

Only a magic mirror knows exactly where the Huskers stand. We can only guess that they're are humbled and, at the same time, in need of a reassuring pat on the back.

But like Davies, I'm also guessing their fighting spirit will return next season.

By then, of course, Solich be more prepared to answer inquiring minds.

While recruiting will play a major role in the long-term success of NU's program, the development of the returners will have a greater bearing on the Huskers' immediate future.

Lord, who had the pressure of replacing a Heisman Trophy winner, established a Nebraska single-season total offense record with 2,774 yards. But NU often become one-dimensional because he completed just 46.7 percent of his passes.

If Lord can turn that part of his game around, there's a lot of hope for the Huskers' offense, as they often used five freshmen and two sophomores.

On defense, there were six freshmen and two sophomores who were mainstays.

"It's somewhat easy to be optimistic," said rush end Trevor Johnson, who will be a senior. "After a season like this, you can only hope for the best."

Throw in the possible return of cornerback Willie Amos, defensive linemen Jason Lohr and Seppo Ewvaraye, and offensive linemen Tim Green and Chris Loos — all of whom sat with injuries this season — and a return to glory may come sooner than later.

"It all sounds good on paper," said split end Mark LeFlore said, "but we have to make it work."

"Never in a billion years did I think we'd go 7-7. We're not going to have another season like this. I guarantee it." ■



Judd Davies' pass on a fake punt didn't quite work out.

Curt McKeever is a sportswriter, covering the University of Nebraska for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football he is the primary beat writer for the men's basketball and baseball teams.

The People

*'Our greatest resource is the
1.7 million and beyond
that are fans of this program'*

By Mike Babcock

A crowd of more than 12,000 greeted Steve Pederson with a standing ovation at halftime of the Nebraska-Creighton men's basketball game at the Devaney Sports Center.

Pederson shook a fist. "It's great to be back," he said.

University Chancellor Harvey Perlman sat across the way, watching with his family, and smiled. His decision to hire Pederson as Nebraska's new athletic director was well received.

The day before, at a news conference in Memorial Stadium's Don Bryant Media Center, Perlman had introduced the 45-year-old Pederson as Bill Byrne's replacement.

And the news conference had become an impromptu pep rally.

Pederson talked about teamwork, taking care of the little things, and how he hoped to enlist the state's population in support of Cornhusker athletics. "Our greatest resource is the 1.7 million and beyond that are fans of this program," he said. "Frank (Solich) and I just added a few more team members to it.

"We've got 1.7 million walk-ons now that we need to get going to help us."

After Byrne's decision to leave to become the athletic director at Texas A&M, Perlman talked about the need to find a replacement who could be a "healer" among Nebraska fans.

Clearly, the healing had begun. "I don't know what we refer to as 'average' fans," said Pederson. "There will be fans that cannot afford, sometimes,

to come to games.

"But that doesn't make them any less of a fan. We need everybody sitting in front of the TV set, just as we need everybody in Memorial Stadium. It goes back to my philosophy that no one is more or less important than anybody else. We treat everybody the same.

"The greatest asset of this university is our fan base. We are so grateful for those who buy tickets, those who can make donations, those who can help us in any other way. But we're grateful for anybody who gets up on Saturday morning, pulls on their red clothes and cheers that day."

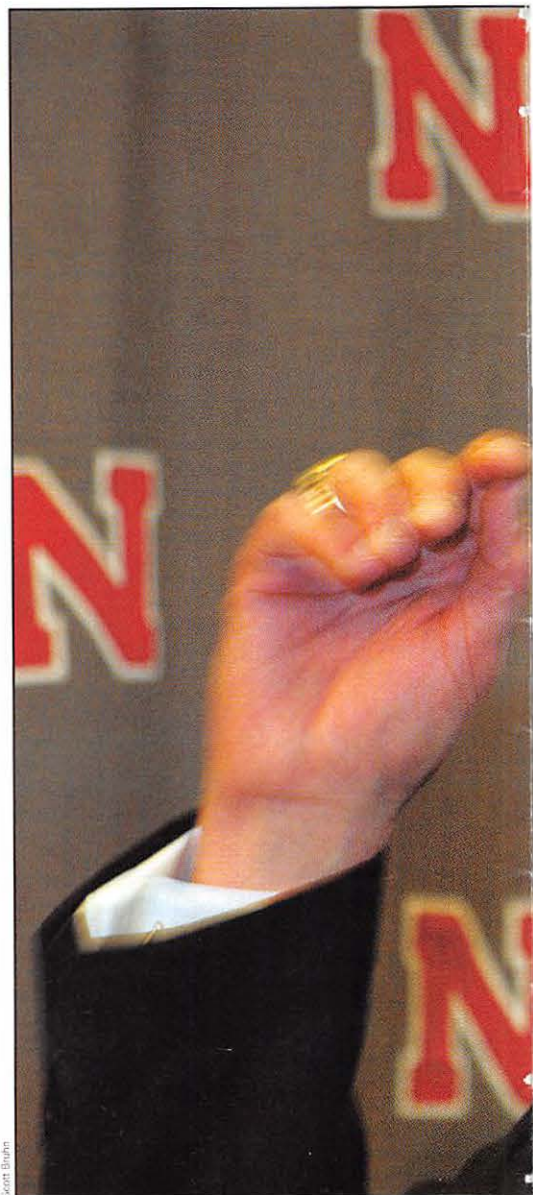
Pederson's enthusiasm has its roots in Nebraska, in North Platte, his home. He wouldn't have left Pittsburgh, where he has been the athletic director for six years, for any other job.

"This is truly a dream come true for a kid from North Platte," he said, thanking Perlman "for this opportunity to lead a great athletic department at the greatest university in the country."

Because of his background, Pederson was the people's choice to replace Byrne. He is a Nebraska graduate, with a degree in business administration and experience in the athletic department.

He was an assistant in the sports information office and then football recruiting coordinator for Tom Osborne, after a brief stint as public relations director for Ak-Sar-Ben in Omaha.

From 1988 to 1991, he was the recruiting coordinator at Ohio State. From 1991 to 1994, he was the recruiting coordinator and associate athletic



director for football operations at Tennessee.

He returned to Nebraska as an associate athletic director and director of football operations for Osborne in 1994. Then, with an assist from Byrne, he went to Pittsburgh in 1996. During his time there he earned a reputation as being a rising young star in collegiate athletic administration.

Osborne recommended him for the Nebraska job as did Byrne, and just about everyone else.

e's Choice



New Athletic Director Steve Pederson dons a Nebraska hat during a Dec. 20 news conference to announce his hiring.

\$300,000 — which includes a \$60,000 annual endowment.

His base salary is set to increase annually through the life of the contract.

That was a long way from the time he was a student assistant in the sports information office, numbering among his responsibilities opening the mail when Joe Selig, who served as interim athletic director until he officially took over on Jan. 1, was "out of town," Pederson said.

"I tell you that story because as I believe, and I know Joe believes and all of our great staff (believes), that you have to know all the little things, you have to know what everybody does. You have to be involved in all the little things to really understand how a great team is built."

He spoke with passion. "I will be a hands-on athletic director because I believe that when you take care of the little things, big things happen," he said. "We have the greatest fans in the world at Nebraska. I want to remind you that our historic success is a result of 1.7 million Nebraskans playing as one."

He talked about rallying the "Husker Nation throughout the United States" and that "now is the time for the pride and enthusiasm of Nebraska fans to become a bigger asset than ever before."

The football program struggled through its worst season since 1961, but athletics, and football in particular, teaches that "when you get knocked down, you get back up again," he said.

"Let's pick ourselves up, join hands and show the character of Nebraska and its fans."

"Today, I make a pledge to you, with your united support behind this program, 1.7 million and more playing as one, those who want to take on the Huskers better bring their A game."

His message, though considerably more brief, was the same at halftime of the Creighton game.

"Nobody can stop us," he said, eliciting response from Bluejay fans as well. ■

The plan was to "find an existing Division I athletic director," Perlman said. "We started that effort, and everyone we talked to said, 'We might be interested, but your person is Steve Pederson.'"

"In that circumstance, it seemed the right thing to do, to short cut this process."

Perlman put together a search committee, which never met. "My intentions were pure when I started

out, and that was to have an orderly, organized public search," he said.

However, "Steve was such an extraordinary candidate and one that matched what Nebraska needed that it was best to not follow the first process and to move as quickly as I could."

Perlman was prepared to pay the price to get someone with Pederson's credentials. His annual salary, on a 5 1/2-year contract, starts at a reported

From NFL to Huskers

***Solich says new
defensive coordinator
Pelini 'understands
what it's all about'***

A measure of Frank Solich's determination to turn around Nebraska's defensive fortunes is reflected in his identifying, and then hiring, 35-year-old Mark "Bo" Pelini.

Pelini has coached the Green Bay Packers' linebackers the past three seasons. And the last time Nebraska turned to the National Football League for a coach was, well, never.

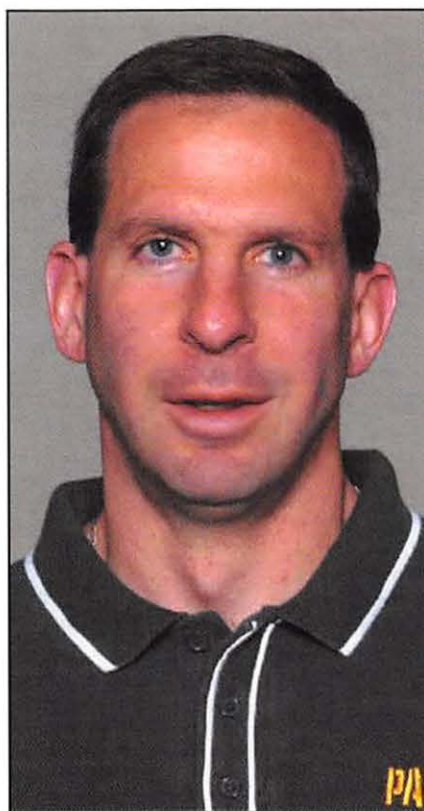
Coaching at the collegiate level is different than coaching at the professional level in some ways, of course, including the demands of recruiting.

But football is football. And the Blackshirts will find themselves "working for a guy that understands what it's all about," Solich said.

Many players whom Nebraska recruits aspire to play in the NFL, and Pelini "knows what it takes to get there," said Solich. "In my mind, that would be a very big plus."

Solich announced Pelini's hiring as defensive coordinator on the Monday the Cornhuskers arrived in Shreveport, La., to begin on-site preparations for the Independence Bowl game.

But the process began soon after the firing of Craig Bohl.



Mark "Bo" Pelini joins the Nebraska staff after three years as Green Bay's linebacker coach.

Pelini was "identified extremely early in the process as a good fit for this program, and I am certain he will be an excellent defensive coordinator for Nebraska," said Solich.

Former Cornhusker Monte Kiffin, who played with Solich at Nebraska in 1963 and served as defensive coordinator under Tom Osborne from 1973 to 1976, was among those who recommended Pelini. Kiffin is a respected NFL defensive coordina-

Nebraska's Defensive Coordinators

Years	Coach
1973-76	Monte Kiffin
1977-80	Lance Van Zandt
1982-99	Charlie McBride
2000-02	Craig Bohl
2003-	Mark "Bo" Pelini

tor, now with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Nebraska's initial interest "pretty much came out of the blue," Pelini told the Omaha World-Herald.

Although he has never served as a defensive coordinator, his resume is impressive. He has been an NFL coach for nine years, beginning as a San Francisco 49ers scouting assistant in the spring of 1994. By the fall, however, he was coaching the 49ers' secondary for head coach George Seifert.

San Francisco won Super Bowl XXIX in Pelini's first season there.

In 1997, he moved to New England, where he coached the Patriot linebackers for Coach Pete Carroll. And after three years there, he joined Coach Mike Sherman's staff in Green Bay.

The announcement of his hiring was delayed by the Packers' preparations for a game against the Buffalo Bills. Pelini was to begin at Nebraska after the Packers' season ended.

"He has great respect for the Green Bay organization and wants to

do everything he can to help them advance into the playoffs and on to the Super Bowl," Solich said. "It tells me that he is always thinking players first. I respect and admire that about him because that is not automatic these days."

Pelini played at Ohio State, earning four letters and starting for two seasons at free safety. He was a three-time Academic All-Big Ten honoree, and a co-captain as a senior.

His first coaching stop was as a graduate assistant at Iowa, under Hayden Fry, for two seasons. Then he returned to Cardinal Mooney High School in Youngstown, Ohio — his alma mater — to coach the quarterbacks and receivers for one season, under his high school coach, Ron Stoops Sr.

The late Stoops, a coaching legend in Ohio, was the father of Oklahoma coach Bob Stoops, Sooners co-defensive coordinator Mike Stoops and Miami secondary coach Mark Stoops.

Pelini is in that mold. He was voted Ohio State's most inspirational player as a senior.

Steve Pederson, Nebraska's new athletic director, was the director of football operations at Ohio State during Pelini's final three seasons with Coach John Cooper's Buckeyes.

Pelini and his wife Mary Pat have two children, with another expected in April.

"It's a heck of an opportunity," Pelini told the Lincoln Journal Star. "It's a chance to work as a coordinator and run my own show, and do it at a place with a lot of tradition."

"I wouldn't have considered doing this unless Nebraska had a first-rate, top-notch program."

The program ranks among the nation's top five, he said.

The Cornhusker defense did not rank among the nation's best this season, however. Going into the Independence Bowl, it was No. 55 nationally in total defense and No. 45 in scoring defense.

Pelini will earn a base salary of \$200,000 to improve those numbers.

"Bo will be a demanding coach, but demanding in the right way," Solich said.

Redshirted freshman defensive tackle Le Kevin Smith summed up what seemed to be the players' atti-

Mark "Bo" Pelini's Coaching Background

Year	College/Pro Team	Position
1991-92	Univ. of Iowa	Graduate Assistant
1994-96	San Francisco 49ers	Defensive Assistant
1997-99	New England Patriots	Linebackers
2000-02	Green Bay Packers	Linebackers

tude. "I think it's going to be a good thing to get some new blood in," he said.

"It's going to be a new guy coming in with new ideas. I think the team is going to really follow behind him. I think it's something that all of

the guys are going to look forward to."

Pelini told the Journal Star he was looking forward to it, too. "Everybody will start fresh," he said.

"The players can learn about me as I'm learning about them." ■



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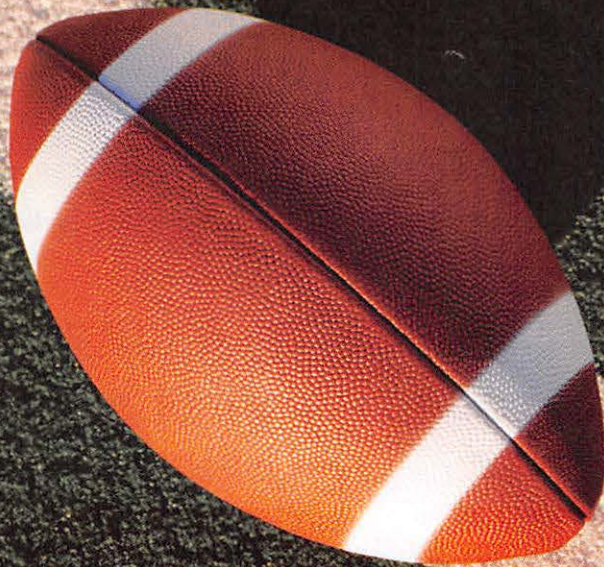


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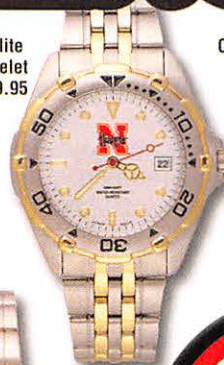
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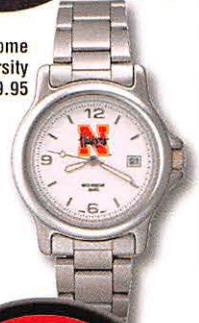
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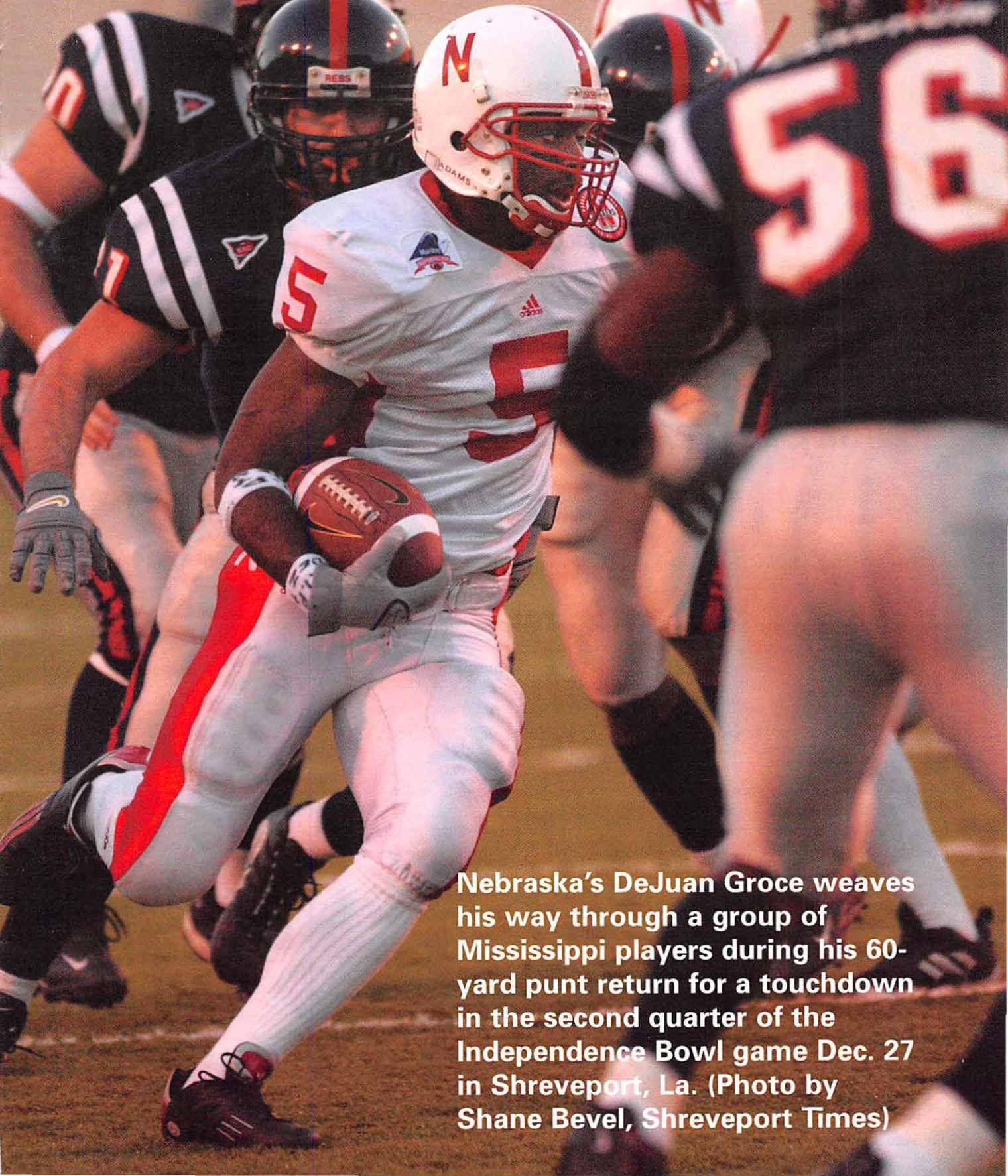


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Mississippi 27

Nebraska 23



Nebraska's DeJuan Groce weaves his way through a group of Mississippi players during his 60-yard punt return for a touchdown in the second quarter of the Independence Bowl game Dec. 27 in Shreveport, La. (Photo by Shane Bevel, Shreveport Times)

More Frustration

Huskers can't hold on to 10-point lead in final chapter of disappointing season

BY MIKE BABCOCK

Frank Solich was on the field, trying to get the attention of an official, with 7:50 remaining in the Independence Bowl game. Josh Brown had just kicked his third field goal, a 29-yarder, to cut the deficit to one — as it turned out, Nebraska wouldn't score again, losing to Mississippi, 27-23.

At issue was an apparent pass interference on the play before the field goal. A flag was thrown, but then waved off because, the officials ruled, the ball had been uncatchable.

The pass was intended for Wilson Thomas, who was grabbed at the line of scrimmage and then fell down after losing his balance, as Mississippi's Travis Johnson reached for the ball, falling out of bounds. The victim, however, was tight end Matt Herian, who also was in the end zone.

Solich wanted to discuss the matter with the officials.

The day after, Solich avoided

specifics. "Sometimes the calls don't go your way, and if you have enough of that in a given year, it can have an effect on you," he said. "You want to be good enough to overcome all that. But there were some things in this game that were upsetting to me."

And some of those things "were in direct view of me and direct view of many people," he said. "It was a tough ballgame to view from that sideline and see calls made and calls not made."

Solich was expressing the frustration not only of the bowl game loss but also of the Cornhuskers' 7-7 record, their worst since 1961, when expectations for the program were far different.

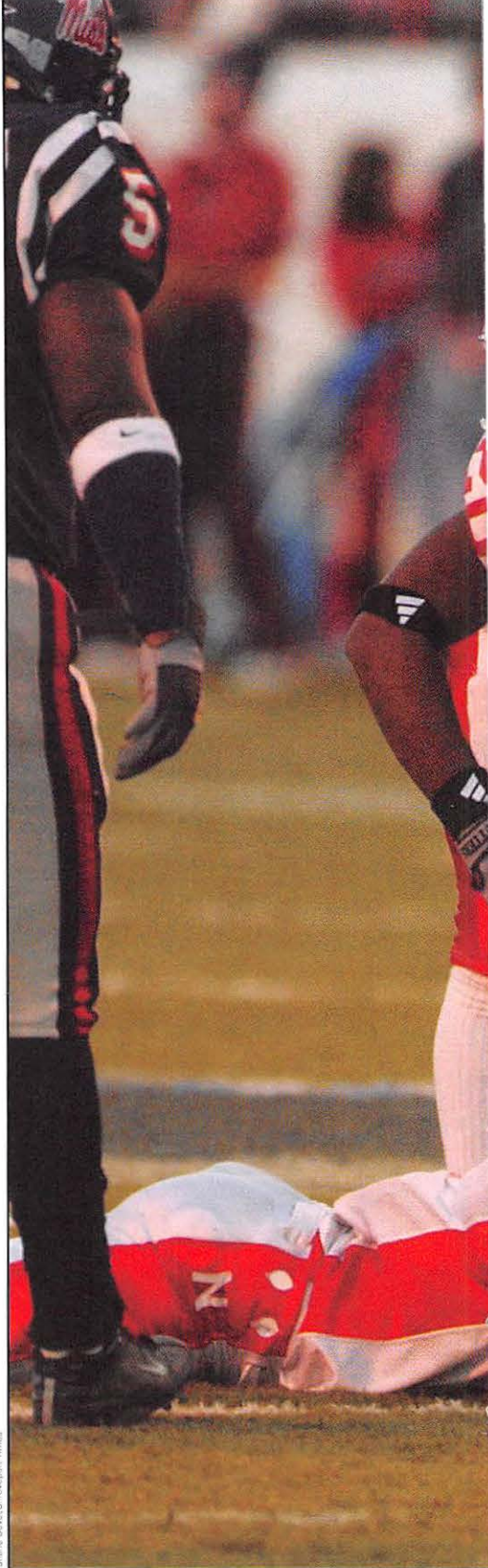
"I think you can have those years where it just seems that things have stacked up a little bit to the negative side, to where your players maybe haven't gotten the number of breaks in a given year that sometimes it takes to have an excellent year, to have a great year," he said.

"Sometimes the ball doesn't

bounce your way."

And for whatever reason, that was the case in 2002.

The Independence Bowl game ended up as another disappointing sequel to the same motion picture that first flickered across the screen at State College, Pa., in late



Shane Bevel/Shoreport Times



Senior cornerback DeJuan Groce is consoled by freshman free safety Josh Bullocks after Groce just missed intercepting a pass thrown by Mississippi quarterback Eli Manning.

the pass, intended for Marques Simmons, incomplete.

Mississippi took over at the 35 and, four plays later, scored what proved to be the winning touchdown. "All those decisions come back to me," Solich said of the fake punt.

"There's no good answer for that, other than it did not work."

Again, he could have been describing the season, not just the bowl game.

For much of the first half in Shreveport, La., before a crowd of 40,712 that included no more than 6,000 Cornhusker fans, what Nebraska did worked. Though the Cornhuskers led only 17-14, they were moving the ball on the ground. They had rushed for 207 yards by halftime.

They also were getting pressure on Ole Miss quarterback Eli Manning, whom they had sacked three times — including two by junior rush end Trevor Johnson.

But Johnson's fast start, like the interference call that was waved off and the fake punt fiasco, fell victim to Murphy's Law: If something can go wrong, it will. And it did.

Late in the half, Johnson left with a concussion. So he was forced to watch the remainder of the game from the sideline. "I wanted to come in so bad," he said. "I actually went and talked to the doctor a few times, but he said a second blow to the head could put you in a coma or something like that.

"So it wouldn't be worth even trying."

He wasn't alone as a spectator. Senior strongside linebacker Scott Shanle couldn't play because of the flu, and offensive guard Mike Erickson injured a shoulder on the first series of the second half.

Erickson's loss compounded a problem in the line. Senior Wes Cody, the other starting guard, couldn't play because of injury. So Junior Tagoa'i and Jake Anderson stepped in.

Losing two players at one position

September.

The only difference was, the Cornhuskers might have won if not for a curious third-quarter play that stood in testament to the perils of miscommunication between coaches and players.

Nebraska faced fourth-and-12 at

its own 35-yard line, clinging to a 20-17 lead, late in the quarter. Fullback Judd Davies, the up-back in punt formation, called an audible in response to the defensive alignment, switching what would have been a Kyle Larson punt into a pass.

Davies took the snap and threw



Nebraska freshman tight end Matt Herian maneuvers around Mississippi's Eric Oliver to score on a 41-yard pass play in the second quarter. Four of Herian's seven catches this season went for touchdowns.



Husker quarterback Jammal Lord gets around Mississippi linebacker Jamil Northcutt on a first quarter run. Lord finished with 83 yards rushing.



Ole Miss quarterback (88) in the second quarter.





Eli Manning is sacked by Nebraska's Barrett Ruud (38), Ira Cooper (11) and Trevor Johnson. Johnson was credited with two sacks before leaving the game with a concussion.

"The season was disappointing to us all. Now that this season is behind us, we'll move forward, and the guys that are coming back are ready to move forward."

— Frank Solich

"does have an effect on you," said Solich, who watched the running game stall out during the second half, gaining just 59 yards on 21 carries.

Quarterback Jammal Lord had a net of minus-5 yards in the second half, after rushing for 88 in the first. I-back Dahrran Diedrick ran for 48 yards in the second half, but carried only five times.

Even though Lord completed only 6-of-17 passes for 93 yards with two interceptions, he "played well enough for us to get it done if we were just hitting on all cylinders," Solich said. "I feel good about him finishing off this last game . . . and what I thought was a good ballgame by him."

Lord was involved in one of two big plays by Nebraska, teaming with Herian on a 41-yard touchdown pass early in the second quarter for a short-lived 10-0 advantage.

The other big play came from steady DeJuan Groce, who returned a punt 60 yards for a touchdown to put the Cornhuskers back ahead by 10, at 17-7, with 2:43 remaining in the first half.

But Mississippi responded with a nine-play, 88-yard touchdown drive in 1 minute and 10 seconds to cut the halftime deficit to three. Then, as happened to Nebraska so often this season, the Rebels drove 57 yards on 13 plays on the first series of the second half to a field goal to tie at 17.

Still, the Cornhuskers battled to

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SHREVEPORT TIMES

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HUSKERS ILLUSTRATED 21

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Notes And Quotes From The Independence Bowl Game

RECORDS, WE'VE GOT RECORDS

The NCAA has begun including bowl game statistics in season totals, increasing the likelihood that records will be broken — the change is not retroactive, however.

As a result, quarterback Jammal Lord broke the Nebraska single-season record for total offense, rushing for 83 yards and passing for 93 yards to bring his total to 2,774 yards.

Eric Crouch held the previous record, with 2,265 yards last season.

Lord's 1,412 rushing yards for the season rank sixth on Nebraska's all-time list.

Senior I-back Dahrnan Diedrick moved from ninth to eighth on the Cornhuskers' career-rushing list, gaining 92 yards on 13 carries. He finished the season with 931 rushing yards.

Senior cornerback DeJuan Groce tied an NCAA single-season record for punt-return touchdowns, with his 60-yarder in the second quarter to give Nebraska a 17-7 lead. Groce also finished the season with a school-record 732 yards on 43 punt returns. His career yardage, 1,218 on 78 returns, ranks second.

Johnny Rodgers holds the school record, with 1,515 yards on 98 returns.

With his three field goals and two extra points, senior place-kicker Josh Brown moved ahead of 1983 Heisman Trophy winner Mike Rozier on Nebraska's career-scoring list.

Brown finished with 315 points, three more than Rozier.

Senior split end Wilson Thomas caught three passes for 34 yards to give him 30 receptions for 353 yards for the season and 68 receptions for 977 yards for his career.

The 68 catches rank sixth on the Cornhuskers' career list.

MARVELOUS MATT

Talented tight end Matt Herian's touchdown catch in the second quarter was his fourth of the season. The true freshman from Pierce, Neb., finished with seven receptions for 301 yards, an average of 43 yards per reception. The 301 receiving yards were the most-ever by a Cornhusker freshman.

DEFENSIVE IMPACT

Senior rush end Chris Kelsay was named the "Defensive Player of the Game." He accounted for 1.5 sacks and was credited with five total tackles. Junior rush end Trevor Johnson had two sacks, and senior rush end Demoiné Adams joined Kelsay on one of the sacks.

MISSING FROM ACTION

The Cornhuskers were without three starters, offensive guard Wes Cody, strongside linebacker Scott Shanle and rover Philip Bland. Cody and Bland were injured, with a knee and hamstring, respectively, while Shanle was ill. Junior Tagoa'i replaced Cody. Ira Cooper replaced Shanle. And Lannie Hopkins replaced Bland. The decision on Cody and Bland wasn't made until game day.

TELEVISION ATTRACTION

The game drew a 3.6 rating on the ESPN cable television network, "tremendous for a mid-afternoon start," according to MainStay Independence Bowl Executive Director Glen Krupica.

"It tells you the power of the Nebraska and Ole Miss football programs."

The rating was "far beyond what our expectations were," Krupica said in a release.

The rating tied for the fifth-best in the bowl game's history.

ENTERTAINMENT PURPOSES ONLY

Richard Rosenblatt of the Associated Press picked the Cornhuskers, setting the line at 6 1/2 points and predicting "could be a rout — for the Huskers . . . Nebraska, 49-28." Not quite.

The Sporting News also anticipated a Cornhusker blowout, noting: "These may not be Tom Osborne's Cornhuskers, but they'll be able to run like them against the Rebels' defense that is undersized up front." The Rebels' best chance, The Sporting News said, "will be to establish an early lead behind the passing of (Eli) Manning against a suspect defense. Nebraska can't play catch-up."

"CYBER BOWL" VICTORY

Diedrick and Lord directed their team to a 42-21 victory against Ole Miss counterparts in a "Cyber Bowl" utilizing the EA Sports NCAA Football 2003 game for Sony PlayStation. The winning team in the brief history of the "Cyber Bowl" had never lost the Independence Bowl game. ■

the end. After Ole Miss responded to Brown's third field goal with a 43-yarder to push the score to 27-23 with 4:38 remaining, Nebraska had two opportunities to win.

It went three-and-punt on the first series, and the second began at its own 20-yard line with only 28 seconds on the clock. On first down, Lord was sacked for a 7-yard loss. On second down, he passed to split end Ross Pilkington for 24 yards and a first down at the Cornhusker 37-yard line.

On the game's final play, Lord threw a desperation pass, which was intercepted.

"The season was disappointing to us all," Solich said the next day. "Now that this season is behind us, we'll move forward, and the guys that are coming back are ready to move forward."

"I don't see it being a situation where there isn't everybody on the same page as far as wanting to get the program back, to get the won-loss record back where it should be."

At least, the Cornhuskers will try to control what they can control. ■

Nebraska's 2002 Results

Aug. 24	Arizona State, W 48-10
Aug. 31	Troy State, W 31-16
Sept. 7	Utah State, W 44-13
Sept. 14	@ Penn State, L 40-7
Sept. 28	@ Iowa State, L 36-14
Oct. 5	McNeese State, W 38-14
Oct. 12	Missouri, W 24-13
Oct. 19	@ Oklahoma St., L 24-21
Oct. 26	@ Texas A&M, W 38-31
Nov. 2	Texas, L 27-24
Nov. 9	Kansas, W 45-7
Nov. 16	@ Kansas State, L 49-13
Nov. 29	Colorado, L 28-13
Dec. 27	*Mississippi, L 27-23

*Independence Bowl, Shreveport, La.

Nebraska's 2003 Schedule

(Subject to change)	
Aug. 30	Oklahoma State
Sept. 6	Utah State
Sept. 13	Penn State
Sept. 20	@ Southern Mississippi
Sept. 27	San Jose State
Oct. 11	@ Missouri
Oct. 18	Texas A&M, Homecoming
Oct. 25	Iowa State
Nov. 1	@ Texas
Nov. 8	@ Kansas
Nov. 15	Kansas State
Nov. 28	@ Colorado

Nebraska vs. Mississippi

Dec. 27, 2002 • Independence Bowl • Shreveport, La.

Score By Quarters

Nebraska	3	14	3	3	—	23
Mississippi	0	14	10	3	—	27

Team Stats

	NU	UM
First Downs	17	20
Rushing	11	5
Passing	5	14
Penalty	1	1
Rushing Attempts	52	32
Yards Gained Rushing	289	84
Yards Lost Rushing	23	32
Net Yards Rushing	266	52
Net Yards Passing	93	313
Passes Attempted	17	44
Passes Completed	7	25
Had Intercepted	2	0
Total Plays	69	76
Total Net Yards	359	365
Avg. Gain Per Play	5.2	4.8
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	1-0
Penalties-Yards	6-70	6-41
Punts-Yards	6-263	8-350
Avg. Per Punt	43.8	43.8
Punt Returns-Yards	8-102	3-23
Interceptions-Yards	0-0	2-27
Fumble Returns-Yards	0-0	0-0
Kickoff Returns-Yards	5-105	5-80
Possession Time	29:29	30:31

Scoring

NU — Josh Brown 29-yard field goal
NU — Matt Herian 41-yard pass from Jammal Lord (Brown kick)
UM — Kerry Johnson 11-yard pass from Eli Manning (Jonathan Nichols kick)
NU — DeJuan Groce 60-yard punt return (Brown kick)
UM — Toward Sanford 1-yard run (Nichols kick)
UM — Nichols 37-yard field goal
NU — Brown 23-yard field goal
UM — Sanford 1-yard run (Nichols kick)
NU — Brown 29-yard field goal
UM — Nichols 43-yard field goal
Att. — 46,096
Weather — clear
Temp. — 53

Individual Statistics

NEBRASKA

Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Diedrick, D.	13	92	7.1	28	0
Lord, J.	17	83	4.9	47	0
Horne, D.	15	65	4.3	12	0
Davis, J.	5	15	3.0	8	0
Davis, J.	2	11	5.5	7	0

Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Lord, J.	7-16-2	43.8	93	1
Davis, J.	0-1-0	0.0	0	0

Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Thomas, W.	3	34	11.3	18	0
Herian, M.	1	41	41.0	41	1
Pilkington, R.	1	24	24.0	24	0
LeFlare, M.	1	-2	-2.0	0	0
Davis, J.	1	-4	-4.0	0	0

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Larson, K.	6	263	43.8	58

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Groce, D.	8	102	12.8	60	1

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Davis, J.	5	105	21.0	43	0

Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Bullocks, J.	5	4	9	0	0	0
Williams, D.	2	7	9	0	0	0
Hopkins, L.	1	8	9	1-1	0	0
Ruud, B.	1	8	9	0	0	0
Washington, F.	6	2	8	0	0	0
Kelsay, C.	3	3	6	3-10	0	1.5-9
Groce, D.	2	3	5	0	0	0
Smith, L.	1	4	5	1-1	0	0
Cooper, I.	1	4	5	0	0	0
Johnson, T.	3	1	4	2-19	0	2-19
McPherson, L.	3	1	4	1-1	0	0
Hollowell, T.	2	1	3	0	0	0
Adams, D.	1	2	3	2-1	0	5-1
Clanton, J.	1	2	3	1-0	0	0
Ickes, A.	2	0	2	0	0	0
Ricketts, P.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Bingham, R.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Terpington, A.	1	1	2	0	0	0

Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Fries, G.	1	0	1	0	0
Grixby, D.	1	0	1	0	0
Hassebrook, T.	1	0	1	0	0
Lord, J.	1	0	1	0	0
Kriewald, S.	0	1	1	0	0
Davis, J.	0	1	1	0	0
Bullocks, D.	0	1	1	0	0
Buller, C.	0	1	1	0	0
Huston, K.	0	1	1	0	0
Simmons, M.	0	1	1	0	0
Smith, J.	0	1	1	0	0

MISSISSIPPI

Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
McClendon, R.	12	36	3.0	9	0
Turner, T.	7	30	4.3	8	0

Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Manning, E.	25-44-0	56.8	313	1

Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Flowers, B.	6	76	12.7	25	0
Collins, C.	6	58	9.7	32	0
Biddle, T.	4	62	15.5	21	0
Johnson, K.	3	47	15.7	19	1
Espy, M.	2	54	27.0	41	0
Rice, E.	2	8	4.0	8	0

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Ridgeway, C.	8	350	43.8	54

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Collins, C.	2	20	10.0	10	0

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Collins, C.	4	68	17.0	23	0

Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Oliver, E.	7	6	13	0	0	0
Blanchard, T.	3	7	10	0	0	0
Strong, E.	3	7	10	2-4	0	0
Mitchell, J.	4	5	9	3-8	0	0
Wade, J.	2	6	8	1-1	0	0
Grier, M.	2	4	6	1-1	0	0
Hutchins, V.	3	1	4	0	1-27	0
Johnson, T.	3	1	4	0	1-0	0
Cooper, J.	3	1	4	2-9	0	1-7
Hamilton, R.	1	3	4	0	0	0

2002 SEASON STATS

(NOTE: BEGINNING THIS YEAR, BOWL GAME STATISTICS ARE INCLUDED IN SEASON STATISTICS)

Name	G	Att.	Yds.	YPC	TD
Lord, J.	14	251	1,412	100.9	8
Diedrick, D.	14	179	931	66.6	6
Horne, D.	9	127	651	72.3	7
Davis, J.	14	42	193	13.8	4
Ross, C.	12	35	184	15.3	2
Davis, J.	13	25	162	12.5	1
LeFlare, M.	13	4	80	6.2	1
Simmons, M.	13	13	56	4.3	0
Collins, T.	3	14	39	13.0	0
Kriewald, S.	14	6	19	1.4	0
Stuntz, M.	6	14	13	2.2	0
Grixby, D.	11	5	9	0.8	0
Thomas, W.	14	1	9	0.6	0
Larson, K.	14	1	8	0.6	0
Pilkington, R.	14	4	7	0.5	0

Name	G	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Lord, J.	14	95-204-12	46.6	1,362	12
Stuntz, M.	6	10-25-0	40.0	100	0
Team	14	0-2-0	0.0	0	0
Chrisman, J.	4	0-1-0	0.0	0	0
Pilkington, R.	14	0-1-0	0.0	0	0
Davis, J.	14	0-1-0	0.0	0	0
Diedrick, D.	14	0-1-0	0.0	0	0

Name	G	No.	Yds.	YPC	YPG	TD
Thomas, W.	14	30	353	11.8	25.2	3
Pilkington, R.	14	14	301	21.5	21.5	1
Davis, J.	13	10	58	5.8	4.5	0
Cornelsen, B.	14	8	106	13.2	7.6	0
Herian, M.	12	7	301	43.0	25.1	4
Hassebrook, T.	14	7	81	11.6	5.8	1
LeFlare, M.	13	6	24	4.0	1.8	0
Ross, C.	12	5	39	7.8	3.2	0
Bowling, J.	12	4	86	21.5	7.2	1
Diedrick, D.	14	4	19	4.8	1.4	0
Horne, D.	9	4	7	1.8	0.8	0
Golliday, A.	14	3	29	9.7	2.1	2
Ringenberg, K.	14	2	40	20.0	2.9	0
Simmons, M.	13	1	18	18.0	1.4	0

Name	G	Att.	Good	Long
Brown, J.	13	15	14	48
Endorf, D.	1	2	2	49

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Larson, K.	73	3,156	43.2	71
Team	2	0	0.0	0

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Groce, D.	43	732	17.0	89	4
Terpington, A.	2	46	23.0	30	1
Cornelsen, B.	2	-3	-1.5	0	0

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Davis, J.	42	994	23.7	53	0
Hassebrook, T.	3	29	9.7	20	0
Simmons, M.	2	42	21.0	22	0

Name	G	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	S/Yds.
Williams, D.	14	38	54	92	6-24	0	1-15
Ruud, B.	14	36	55	91	12-36	0	2-17
Bland, P.	13	44	40	84	6-16	1-0	0
Shanley, S.	13	31	40	71	5-19	0	2-15
Bingham, R.	14	21	46	67	9-18	0	1-5-9
Kabongo, P.	14	12	50	62	9-25	0	2-17
Groce, D.	14	38	23	61	2-3	4-26	0
Hollowell, T.	14	20	40	60	2-6	0	1-5
Ricketts, P.	14	32	24	56	1-4	2-5	0
Johnson, T.	14	19	35	54	11-40	0	3.5-25
Washington, F.	13	34	15	49	1-2	4-35	0
Bullocks, J.	13	26	22	48	0	1-19	0
Smith, J.	14	14	32	46	8-19	0	1.5-11
Clanton, J.	14	15	30	45	5-14	0	1-8
Smith, L.	14	16	26	42	6-11	0	1-6
Kelsay, C.	9	17	21	38	13-58	0	7-49
Adams, D.	14	14	23	37	11-24	0	4-18
Sievers, C.	9	15	22	37	2-4	0	0
Pippens, J.	14	16	17	33	0	0	0
Hopkins, L.	13	7	17	24	5-21	0	2.5-19
Adams, T.	13	6	15	21	3-18	0	2-17
McPherson, L.	13	10	7	17	2-4	0	0
Terpington, A.	14	4	13	17	2-1	0	0
Bullocks, D.	12	5	11	16	0	0	0
Siegel, S.	14	7	7	14	1-1	0	0
Cooper, I.	14	4	8	12	0	0	0
Buller, C.	14	3	6	9	0	0	0

TEAM STATISTICS		NU	OPP			
Total Offensive Yards		5,224				5,067
Plays		959				1,008
Average Per Play		5.4				5.0
Average Per Game		373.1				361.9
Net Rushing Yards		3,762				2,053
Attempts		724				549
TDs Rushing		29				25
Net Passing Yards		1,462				3,014
Completions		105				231
Average Per Pass		6.2				6.6
Average Per Catch		13.9				13.0
Average Per Game		104.4				215.3
TDs Passing		12				12
Sacks By-Yards		32-231				26-188
Fumbles-Lost		30-12				23-8
Penalties-Yards		85-784				90-676
Scoring	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	OT	TOT
NU	68	123	97	95	0	383
Opponents	68	76	110	81	0	335

Aches & Pains

Horne hopes to gain weight to help him deal with the physical demands of playing I-back

At times following games, particularly when he first began playing, the aches and pains were such that David Horne had difficulty sleeping. So he would pull himself out of bed, apply ice to his shoulders or his arms or his legs and watch television until he could finally doze off.

His body continued to ache all day Sunday, and into Monday morning.

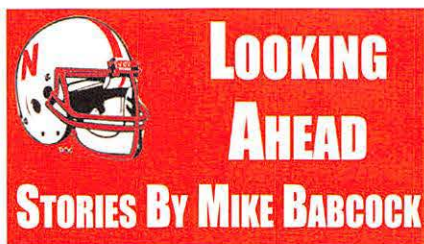
"You get up and your bones are popping, your neck is popping," said Horne, who also had difficulty getting to an 8:30 a.m. math class on Mondays. He was always rushing to be on time.

"I feel like an old man now," he said with a smile.

Horne won't celebrate his 19th birthday until late July, just a few days before he and his Nebraska teammates will be reporting for the start of two-a-day practices. He hopes to be heavier than he is now, to better deal with the physical demands of playing I-back at the major college level.

But "I can never retain my weight," he said. "I can't tell you why."

The freshman from Omaha weighed 180 pounds when he arrived at Nebraska. He had ballooned to nearly 200 pounds by mid-September, when he figured he would be red-



shirting.

After he gave up the redshirt and began playing, the week after the Iowa State game, however, his weight dropped. He wasn't lifting as much as he had been, and he wasn't eating.

"I was too tired, too sore," to do either, he said.

When the team left for the Independence Bowl, he was back to 195. By then, he had learned how to take hits and how to avoid hits, how to get out of bounds when there was no other choice, how to get low so that tacklers wouldn't be able to "get a full shot at you, stuff like that," he said.

Dahrran Diedrick was among the veterans who warned Horne how it would be during two-a-days. Diedrick encouraged Horne to stay low for one-on-one blocking drills, when he was matched against full-backs like Judd Davies or linebackers like Barrett Ruud and Demorrio Williams.

"It only takes once getting knocked on your butt," said Horne.

Nearly six months later, Horne is a



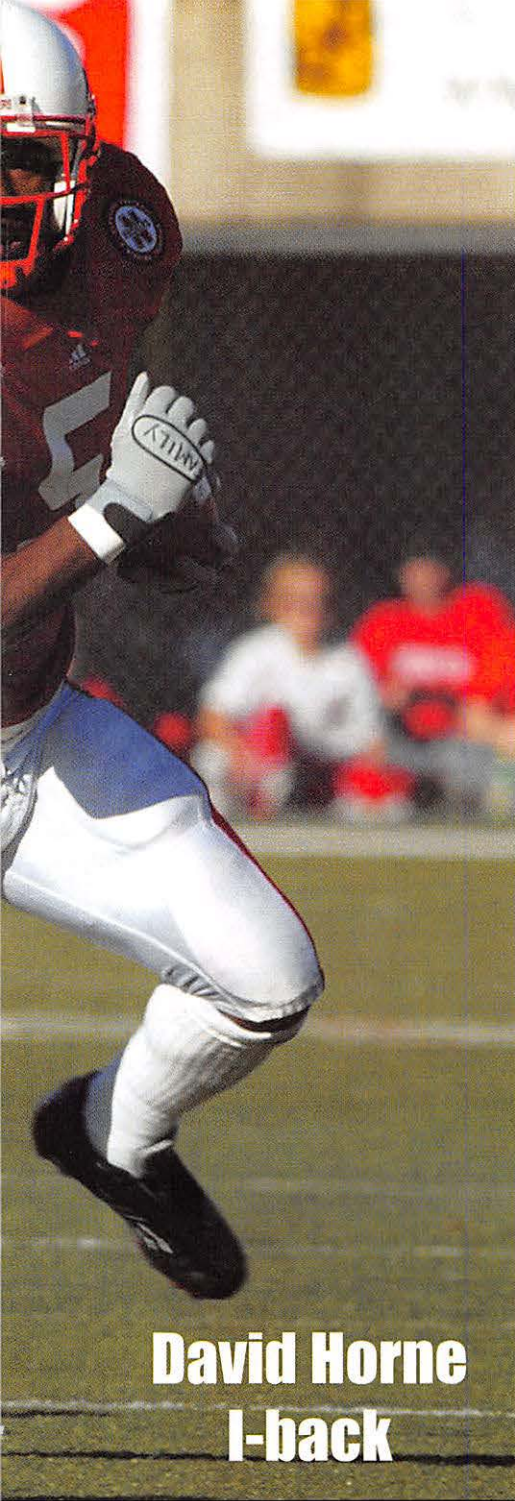
veteran, the most experienced of Nebraska's returning I-backs. Despite missing the first five games, he rushed for 651 yards and seven touchdowns.

His rushing total was the fourth best by a Cornhusker freshman, behind only Ahman Green, Calvin Jones and DeAngelo Evans. Not bad for someone who didn't expect to play this season.

The decision to shed the redshirt was Horne's, and it wasn't easy.

"I went back and forth," he said. "At first, I wasn't going to do it."

The Cornhuskers were five games



David Horne
I-back

into the season, for one thing. And they had lost two of those games, for another. "I didn't want to come in on losing terms," said Horne.

He also didn't want to give up a season's eligibility without an assurance that he would see more than token action. "I thought it might be a waste of a year," he said. "If I came in and didn't do good, my redshirt was gone. I would have to start all over again. So I didn't want to do that.

"If it didn't work out, it wouldn't be worth it. What if I did bad one game? They would never put me back in. Then the next year I might redshirt

again, and I wasted a whole year for nothing."

He asked questions. Where would he begin on the depth chart? Would he get a fair shot at the job? How much could he expect to play? "I didn't want it to be just a short-term thing," he said.

After much consideration, he decided that if there were a chance he could help, he would try. He placed the team ahead of personal interests. "I could see we were struggling, and I thought whatever I could do to get us back on track, I was all for it," he said. "I can't be an individual any more.

"I had to do whatever was best for the team."

Even so, he felt the pressure of his situation. If he didn't show he could contribute, and show that immediately, he would have given up the season of eligibility.

His first carry, on the final play of the first quarter of the McNeese State game, he didn't know what play had been called, but "I hit things hard," he said. "I got hit by the middle line-backer. It woke me up. Welcome to college football. After that, I felt great. I think I adjusted pretty well."

He picked up only 3 yards on that first carry.

But he gained 16 yards on his second carry. He was off and running.

He finished with 81 yards, on 12 carries, against McNeese State then scored his first touchdown, on a 5-yard run, the second time he touched the ball a week later against Missouri.

He scored his second touchdown

the next week at Oklahoma State, rushing for 125 yards, and then came up big at Texas A&M, rushing for 128 yards and scoring four touchdowns.

"It wasn't as hard as I thought it was," said Horne. "I got in a groove. They kept giving me the ball. The linemen did a great job. The holes were like in practice."

They were until the Texas game, that is. Horne struggled late in the season. Against Texas, Kansas State and Colorado, he carried a combined 23 times for 42 yards.

He finished off his first season with 15 carries for 65 yards against Ole Miss.

Even though he's the most experienced of the returning I-backs, he won't take anything for granted going into the spring. Only Diedrick won't be back. He'll be competing with sophomores Cory Ross and Marques Simmons and seniors Josh Davis, DeAntae Grixby and Robin Miller.

Grixby played fullback this season but still considers himself an I-back.

"I'm not going into the spring thinking I'm going to be No. 1 because I had a good year," Horne said. "We've got new coaches coming in, a lot of new ideas, a new offensive coordinator.

"You never know what he's going to do to the offense. So it'll be like this year, at the bottom of the pile, working my way up. When I come in, I'll be ready. I'm not starting all over."

He knows what to expect, the aches and pains. But he'll be better able to avoid them. ■

Top Rushing Seasons By Freshmen

Player (Year)	Att.	Yards	Avg.	TD
1. Ahman Green, IB (1995)*	141	1,086	7.70	13
2. Calvin Jones, IB (1991)	108	900	8.33	14
3. DeAngelo Evans, IB (1996)*	148	776	5.24	14
4. David Horne, IB (2002)*	127	651	5.13	7
5. Monte Anthony, IB (1974)*	109	587	5.39	7
6. Lawrence Phillips, IB (1993)*	92	508	5.52	5
7. Eric Crouch, QB (1998)	96	459	4.78	5
8. Tommie Frazier, QB (1992)*	86	399	4.64	7
9. Derek Brown, IB (1990)	59	375	6.36	5
10. Damon Benning, IB (1993)	55	323	5.90	4

*true freshman

Note: Bowl statistics did not count on season totals until 2002.

On-Going Process

Washington says things will be different without Groce for support

Fabian Washington was everything he was supposed to be, almost. He was lighter than the 175 pounds at which he was listed when he arrived at Nebraska in the summer.

He weighed 163 then. By the end of his freshman season, he weighed 174.

"I wanted to be like 180," he said. "But it's coming along."

So is his development as a cornerback. He was accustomed to playing man-to-man coverage at Bayshore High School in Bradenton, Fla., where he was a four-year starter on defense, coached by former Cornhusker Leslie Dennis. But he had to be able to mix in some zone.

"I've adjusted," he said. "I can play either one now."

The adjustment wasn't easy, of course. "I had to know how to be patient, (to) stay in my zone instead of just running with the man, because I was always thinking man-to-man," he said.



LOOKING AHEAD

He also had to temper an aggressiveness that caused him to react to a receiver's first move.

"If they cut, I'm going like a missile," said Washington.

That's good. But the problem occurred when a receiver made a second move.

"I've got to let stuff play out and read receivers better," he said.

That was an on-going process throughout the season, and it will continue in the spring. The only difference is, DeJuan Groce has completed his eligibility and won't be around to help.

When he was confused, Washington relied on Groce to answer his questions. In zone coverage, for example, Groce would remind him to forget about individual receivers, and "play off the quarterback,"



Washington said. Without the gregarious Groce for support, "it will be different.

"There are still some guys I can ask for help. But DeJuan was the main person I went to for help when I needed it. I've pretty much got to learn everything on my own now.

"I think I can adjust since I've learned all the plays."

Washington's Freshman Season

Games		Tackles			Pass Defense	
GP	GS	Solo	Ast	Tot	Int-Yds	BrUp
13	11	34	15	49	4-35	13



Fabian Washington Cornerback

The learning curve wasn't as dramatic as Washington would have liked. "At first, things were going slow," he said. "You're thinking about the play and the player you've got to guard."

"So once I learned the plays, it got a lot easier."

Considering he was a true freshman, however, he adapted quickly.

He earned a Blackshirt and became the starting left cornerback just six games into the season.

Prior to that even, he had started twice as a nickel back.

His numbers underscored his rapid development. He finished with 49 tackles, including 34 unassisted, and broke the school record for pass break-ups by a freshman with 13. He also broke the freshman record for interceptions with four, including two against Iowa State's Seneca Wallace.

He returned the first of the four 29 yards for a touchdown against Arizona State in the opener.

"It was a good play," said Washington. "I did read the receiver and the quarterback pretty well, and I jumped on the pass. But I knew it wasn't going to come like that all the time."

He would endure some difficult times after that, matching up against outstanding receivers, among them Rashaun Woods of Oklahoma State and Roy Williams of Texas.

"I think I faced them all," Washington said. "Every game was a learning experience. You never face the same type of receiver, so I learned something different every week."

Washington earned All-Big 12 honorable mention from the conference coaches, and he was included on The Sporting News freshman All-America second team.

He'll help to provide a solid foundation for the new secondary coach, who will have all but two of last season's regulars returning — Groce and rover Aaron Terpening.

Washington heads a list of cornerbacks that will include five others on the Independence Bowl depth chart: seniors Pat Ricketts and Terrell Butler; juniors Lornell McPherson and Kellen Huston and sophomore Shane Siegel. Junior Willie Amos also is expected to return.

Amos was sidelined by a knee injury, suffered last spring.

Washington planned to go home to Florida for two weeks following the Independence Bowl, in which he was credited with eight tackles and two pass break-ups. Then he planned to return for second-semester classes and focus on getting ready for spring practice — including gaining some weight.

He was a SuperPrep All-American in high school, good enough to play without redshirting, which he did. The only inaccuracy on his resume was his weight. And he's working on that. ■

Watch for the special March Recruiting Edition ... available in late February

Huskers Illustrated

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Up and Down

Collier looks for more players to contribute consistently

Consistency has been a problem for the Nebraska men's team as it begins Big 12 play. That's a function of the Cornhuskers' youth — Brennon Clemmons is the team's only senior.

The non-conference season didn't change Coach Barry Collier's estimation of his third Nebraska team on that count. Comparing where the Cornhuskers were at the beginning of the season to where they were in early January, "we have the same thoughts about their abilities," Collier said.

"What is pretty apparent is that we have some up and down in our play with different individuals. While one game John Turek may have an excellent game, someone else may not. And the next game he has not as good of a game while someone else rises up, to an extent. So we've got this up and down in our play. We need more guys to contribute consistently and kind of the tide to rise for all of them."

Sophomore Jake Muhleisen and junior Andrew Drevo have been the most consistent, according to Collier, and sophomore Corey Simms has moved in that direction. Simms "has been pretty consistent and has focused on his strengths, stayed away from things he's not as good at," said Collier.

But the other players in Nebraska's regular rotation have been up and down.

"We need better play, more consistent play, out of that group," Collier said of Turek, Nate Johnson, Brian Conklin and true freshmen Jason Dourisseau and Wes Wilkinson. Add Clemmons, who was sidelined by dislocated toes, and "that would give us eight or nine pretty strong players."

Not having Clemmons was a factor, said Collier "because Brennon's single biggest strength is his ability on defense to stay in front of people, to rebound for us."

"He gives us another quick player on the perimeter."

Defense is the key to success in Collier's system.

Being aggressive on defense and pressuring opponents can help offensively. "We'll get some easy hoops, and that will feed our offense a little bit better," Drevo said.

At times, the Cornhuskers have been hesitant on defense. They haven't applied enough pressure, and as a result, they haven't gotten "a lot of easy hoops in transition," said Drevo.

Muhleisen also understands the correlation between defense and offense.

"If we have a lot more intensity on defense, I think we'll be able to get a lot more steals, not a ton more, maybe two or three a game. But those might result in six more points," he said.

"Easy baskets will get you in the flow of the game a lot better. Playing tough on defense will make you play tough on offense, too, set better screens, move a lot harder, cut a lot harder."

Collier hasn't questioned his captain's effort and intensity. Muhleisen "doesn't ride the fortunes of his shot quite as



True freshman Jason Dourisseau scored a career-high 19 points vs. Eastern Washington.

much as some of our other perimeter guys," Collier said.

"I do think that we are tying our defensive intensity, effort and effectiveness to our offensive play. And that's not good. We need to do it the other way around, put more into defense, not let defense be affected by offense because that really shouldn't be the case."

Nebraska's defensive lapses have proved costly.

Defense demands determination and a sense of urgency, never letting up. And each player must be responsible for that, according to Muhleisen.

"A lot of times, a lot of us think, oh, it'll be all right if we just kind of take a play off here and there," he said. "We just need to get more intense, take more pride in our defense, take pride in stopping our man and not relying on our teammates."

At times, "we rely on our teammates more than we should," he said. "It's good that our teammates are going to be there. But we've got to take more pride in stopping our guys one-on-one."

The Cornhuskers have shown that pride, "we've shown we can play great defense," said Muhleisen. "We know we can do it. We just need to do it on a more consistent basis."

"The same way with offense. We'll have some times where we'll set screens and we'll get guys wide open. And then sometimes we'll just whiff a guy, not even set a screen and we won't have a shot."

The bottom line is, "we just need to get more consistent," he said. "Consistency is a major factor with us. I think all of us need to play more consistent, on both ends of the floor."

That's especially true now. "We need to make sure we come out hard, intense and focused," Muhleisen said. If not, "we're going to be in trouble going into the Big 12." ■

Men's Basketball

Nov. 21	*Centenary, W 68-45
Nov. 23	*Alaska-Fairbanks, L 64-61
Nov. 24	*Ball State, L 73-65
Dec. 1	Texas-San Antonio, W 69-53
Dec. 5	@ South Florida, L 65-60
Dec. 8	Minnesota, W 80-60
Dec. 14	Indiana-Purdue-FW, W 63-46
Dec. 21	Creighton, L 81-73
Dec. 27	UC-Santa Barbara, W 60-57
Dec. 28	Arizona State, L 75-63
Dec. 31	E. Washington, W 63-60
Jan. 4	Denver, W 79-75 ot
Jan. 7	Lipscomb, W 70-60
Jan. 11	@ Kansas (ESPN+)
Jan. 15	Texas A&M
Jan. 18	Colorado
Jan. 22	@ Kansas State
Jan. 25	@ Iowa State (ESPN+)
Jan. 29	Missouri
Feb. 1	Kansas (ESPN)
Feb. 5	@ Texas Tech
Feb. 12	Oklahoma State
Feb. 15	Texas (ESPN+)
Feb. 18	@ Missouri
Feb. 22	@ Baylor
Feb. 25	Kansas State
Mar. 1	Iowa State
Mar. 4	@ Oklahoma
Mar. 8	@ Colorado
Mar. 13-16	@ Big 12 Tournament, Dallas, Texas

*Top of the World Classic, Fairbanks, Ala.
#ASU Hoops Classic, Tempe, Ariz.



Junior Alexa Johnson scored a career-high 27 points as Nebraska upset then No. 25-ranked Cincinnati 65-55 Dec. 15 in Lincoln.

Women's Basketball

Nov. 22	Grambling State, W 63-40	Jan. 25	Iowa State
Nov. 24	Rice, W 71-56	Jan. 29	@ Kansas
Dec. 1	@ Creighton, L 55-40	Feb. 1	@ Oklahoma State
Dec. 5	Drake, L 63-55	Feb. 5	Baylor
Dec. 9	Texas Southern, W 71-48	Feb. 8	Missouri
Dec. 11	Cal State-Fullerton, W 78-60	Feb. 12	@ Kansas State
Dec. 15	Cincinnati, W 65-55	Feb. 15	@ Texas A&M
Dec. 22	New Orleans, W 73-62	Feb. 19	Kansas
Dec. 28	*San Diego, W 62-61	Feb. 22	@ Texas
Dec. 30	*Penn State, L 83-64	Feb. 26	Texas Tech
Jan. 5	Texas-Pan American, L 61-58	Mar. 1	@ Iowa State
Jan. 11	Oklahoma (FSN)	Mar. 5	Colorado
Jan. 14	@ Colorado	Mar. 11-15	@ Big 12 Tournament, Dallas, Texas
Jan. 19	Kansas State		
Jan. 22	@ Missouri		

*Surf & Slam Hoop Classic, San Diego

RIM SHOTS

Notes And Quotes From The Basketball World

UPGRADE

The Nebraska men's non-conference schedule will include another high-profile opponent next season with the addition of a home-and-home series against Purdue of the Big Ten.

The Cornhuskers will travel to West Lafayette, Ind., next season and then play the Boilermakers at the Devaney Sports Center in 2004-05. The schools last met in basketball in 1979.

Nebraska trails in the series, which began in 1947, 6-2.

The Cornhuskers' non-conference schedule next season also includes a game against Minnesota on the road as well as home games against Arizona State, Tennessee and South Florida.

NO THOMAS

Wilson Thomas was included in the basketball media guide, but the football team's leading receiver has opted not to play basketball, after contributing the past two seasons.

He averaged 3.2 points and 2.7 rebounds, with three starts in 33 games.

Thomas, who caught 30 passes for 353 yards and three touchdowns "is going to focus on getting himself ready for the (NFL) Combines," Coach Barry Collier said. "He still loves basketball, but he wants to give his focused, best shot (in) his pursuit of professional football."

The 6-foot-6, 215-pound Thomas provided inside help. But "this year is different," said Collier. "We are talking about a team that has a host of bigger guys, and that was really the position he filled."

Junior Andrew Drevo, a transfer from Morningside College, "has taken the spot, really, that Wilson played," Collier said, adding that John Turek, Wes Wilkinson, Brian Conklin and Tony Wilbrand also are available to "play those minutes, so maybe it can be looked at either direction."

"He was certainly welcome to be on our team. I don't mean to say we're glad he didn't come out because that's not true. But it might have been a different situation this year for him."



Wes Wilkinson

PERIOD OF ADJUSTMENT

Wilkinson, the 6-9, 205-pound true freshman from Grand Island, Neb., of whom much is expected, has struggled at times. "He's shown inexperience in games, finding a comfort level, I suppose, when he feels that he can do the things that he's used to doing," Collier said.

"Part of that is also realizing that you cannot do all the things you were doing in high school."

Wilkinson, Nebraska's Mr. Basketball, averaged 18.6 points and 7.5 as a senior.

He found himself playing small forward at times early in the season, "and that created more problems for him," said Collier. "Now, he's almost exclusively playing the four (position)."

"There aren't as many new skills required of him at that position."

Sophomore Corey Simms went through a similar transition last season.

"It goes at different speeds, depending on what you're trying to do," Collier said.

DOURISSEAU STEPS UP

Jason Dourisseau, the Cornhuskers' other true freshman, has adapted well. He got his first start against Creighton but struggled, scoring only two points in 12 minutes of action. Three games later, he scored a career-high 19 points in a 63-60 victory against Eastern Washington.

"We really think that he's got great skills to shoot the ball," said Collier.

"He's been doing a really nice job of just trying to do whatever he can. I think he's got opportunities to do maybe even a little bit more because he needs to find his times to penetrate."

INCONSISTENCY ILLUSTRATED

Junior Nate Johnson played a key role in the Eastern Washington victory, scoring 10 of Nebraska's final 11 points, in the last 2:45 as the Cornhuskers rallied from a three-point deficit.

Johnson started but watched most of the game from the bench. Collier pulled him out three times but gave him one more chance down the stretch. And he responded in a big way.

Afterward, Collier "said that I struck out three times but on the fourth time, I hit a home run," Johnson said. "So it just goes to show, you don't have to give up. If you go hard, things will happen."

Johnson was similarly inconsistent in a 60-57 victory against UC Santa Barbara.

Collier pulled him out of that game, as well. "I sat down and I really got to thinking to myself, 'I'm still letting my teammates down. You've got to do something to help,'" said Johnson.

"I felt like I had to bring some kind of confidence and self-esteem back, stay focused, go out and play hard."

Johnson, the NJCAA Division II national player of the year, responded like an All-American against Eastern Washington. "I told him when we were leaving the court, that was the stuff All-Americans do right there, take over a whole game like that," Dourisseau said.

"He was just as good as advertised in that situation."



Katie Morse

BITTERSWEET VICTORY

Coach Connie Yori's women's team upset then No. 25-ranked Cincinnati 65-55 at the Devaney Sports Center in mid-December to give Yori 200 coaching victories during her career.

However, the Huskers lost Katie Morse, who suffered a season-ending knee injury.

The 6-4 junior from Minden, Iowa, was averaging 12 points and 7.9 rebounds and had a team-high 15 blocked shots. "It was a bittersweet victory," Yori said. "I'm glad we

won.

"But I would trade the win to have Katie back for the rest of the season."

The injury, a torn ACL, occurred with 8:10 remaining.

The Huskers' Margaret Richards held Bearcats' All-American Valerie King to three points. King, who went into the game averaging 24.8 points, was 0-for-14 from the field.

Alexa Johnson led Nebraska with a career-high 27 points.

REINFORCEMENTS

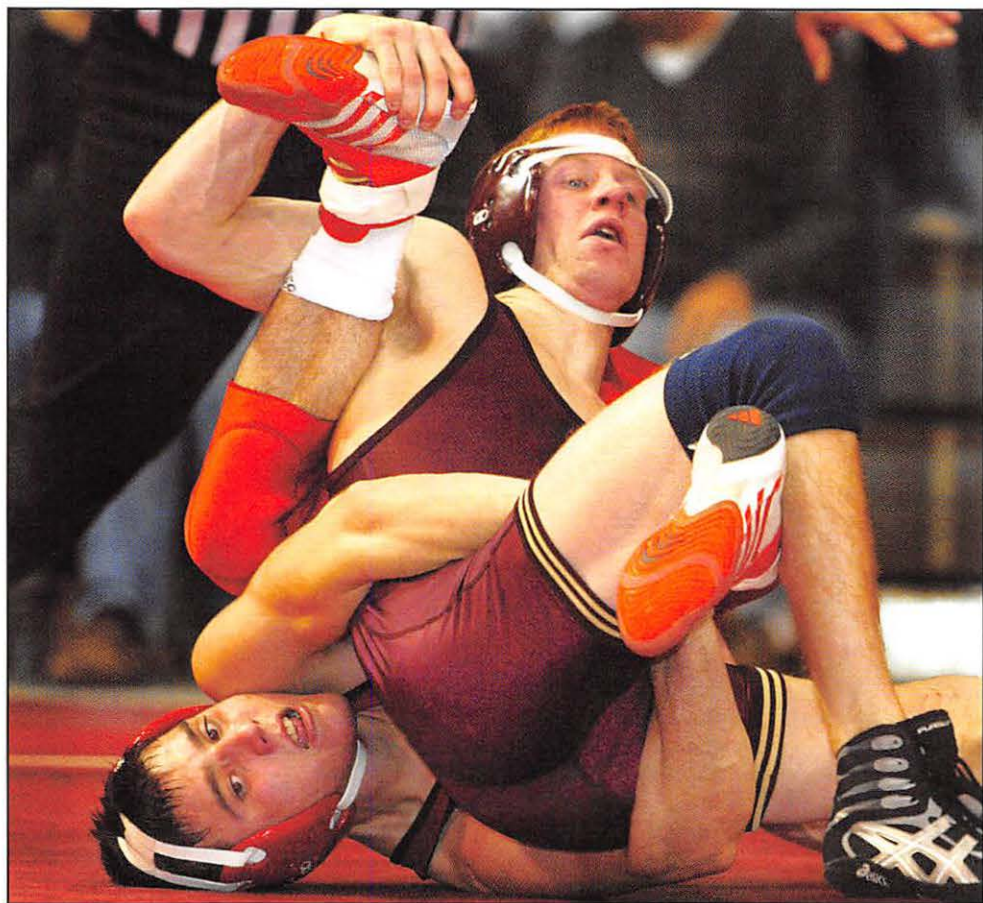
The loss of Morse further aggravated Yori's much publicized numbers problems. But she got some help at year's end, with the addition of Jessie Runty, Greichaly Cepero and Laura Pilakowski.

Runty, a freshman walk-on, had to sit out first semester after transferring, while Cepero and Pilakowski joined the team following the volleyball season — in which they shared the award as Big 12 Player of the year with teammate Amber Holmquist. Both are three-time All-Americans.

The 6-2 Cepero played in 37 games for the basketball team the past two seasons, starting 17 and averaging 4.8 points and 4.4 rebounds. The 6-1 Pilakowski averaged 17.7 points and 10.4 rebounds and was a second-team Super-State selection in her final two seasons at Columbus, Neb., High School. ■

Women's Gymnastics

Senior Jen French shows her form on the balance beam, where she finished with a 9.85 to tie for fourth place as the fifth-ranked Nebraska women's gymnastics team opened the new year with a 196.45-195.40 victory over No. 2 Georgia in Lincoln. It was Georgia's first opening-dual-meet loss since 1987 and the Huskers' first victory in 11 head-to-head meetings. Nebraska junior Richelle Simpson captured the all-around title with a 39.40.



Wrestling

Nebraska junior Jason Powell (bottom), who is ranked third at 125 pounds, keeps his hold on Minnesota's Bobby Lowe en route to a 10-5 overtime victory during a dual meet in Lincoln. The third-ranked and two-time defending national champion Gophers defeated the 11th-rated Huskers 27-12.

Moving On

Huskers looking toward 2003 without talented group of seniors

By Todd Henrichs

After four years where virtually everything went right for the seniors on Nebraska's volleyball team, the talented quartet had to rely on home-court magic to extend its career to the final four.

Didn't happen.

Seemingly punished by a hard-to-figure selection committee, fourth-ranked Nebraska had its season ended by No. 2 Hawaii in the regional semifinals. The 30-25, 25-30, 30-27, 30-21 loss ended the nation's longest home-court winning streak at 63 matches.

It was the first time Nebraska fell short of the final four since 1999, the freshman year for the Husker seniors.

In their four years, Greichaly Cepero, Amber Holmquist, Laura Pilakowski and Lindsay Wischmeier won a national championship and compiled a 123-10 record. It's believed to be the fourth best four-year mark in Division I history.

Cepero and Holmquist both ended their careers as first-team All-Americans. Holmquist, Nebraska's all-time leader in blocks, broke the single-season school record averaging 2.01 blocks per game her senior year.

Pilakowski was a second-team All-American, and Wischmeier, who played every match of her four-year career, ended as NU's all-time leader in digs.

When it was over, each senior struggled to put into words the pain of falling short of the final goal of her career.

"When you play a team like Hawaii, you have to expect the close



Nebraska freshman right side hitter Jennifer Saleaumua earned honorable-mention All-Big 12 honors.

games," Holmquist said, and "the real important points just didn't fall for us."

Nebraska struggled to serve and pass adequately against the talented Rainbow Wahine. The Huskers

served only one ace against 13 errors, and Nebraska's offense fizzled, hitting just .203 after nine straight matches hitting .300 or better.

Forever, the question will be asked if Nebraska's schedule sufficiently prepared the Huskers. Nebraska buzzed through the underachieving Big 12, dropping fewer games than ever before. Road matches at Arizona, Texas A&M and Texas were the only times NU did not sweep a foe in its 29-match winning streak.

Nebraska was the only conference team to make it to a regional, the first time that's happened in the seven-year history of the league.

"I have no control over the conference, but the reality is we need to have top-10 teams in our league," Nebraska Coach John Cook said. "What we could control, we scheduled as tough as we could."

Cook believes the Big 12 is building up for a more competitive future, a prospect bolstered by Nebraska's departing seniors.

After back-to-back strong recruiting classes, Texas could only be a year or two away from returning to national dominance, and Texas A&M had the league's freshman of the year.

Kansas State and Missouri finished second and third, respectively, in the league, and both programs are fixated on knocking Nebraska from its perch atop the standings. With the exception of 1997, Nebraska has won the league every year, and the Huskers will carry a 71-match winning streak against league foes into next season.

But 2003 will be the biggest challenge Cook has faced at Nebraska. It's likely the biggest transition year since the one following the Huskers' 1995 national championship season.

The Huskers will return starters Anna Schrad, Melissa Elmer and Jennifer Saleaumua. Schrad had her best year statistically, and Cook believes she will lift her game to another level as a senior next season. Elmer and Saleaumua were all-Big 12 honorees as freshmen.

Michelle Lynch will be NU's setter although Cook wants to explore running a two-setter system next fall similar to the offense executed by national champion Southern California. Among Nebraska's class of incoming recruits is Dani Busboom, an athletically gifted setter from Freeman High School in Adams.

If Busboom is ready, the two-setter

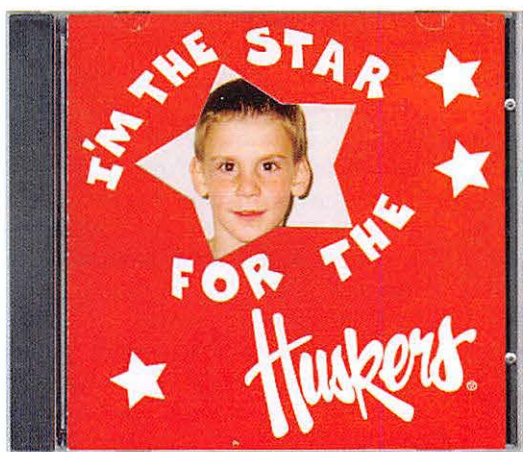
system should benefit Nebraska's lineup.

"We have a lot of good hitters, but we don't have a great hitter," Cook said. "I really like this system because it's a way to attack anywhere with anybody. Against USC early in the year, we saw how difficult it was to prepare for."

Promising Ally Rebholz should step into another starting spot and Cook will look to redshirting freshmen Olivia Waldowski and Kelsey Fautsch for key contributions. Jenae Dowling will be considered for the critical libero spot.

Nebraska will lose the dominant presence of Holmquist, one of the best blockers ever to play in college, the raw athleticism of Pilakowski and Cepero and the gritty determination of Wischmeier. But most significantly, Cook said it's the seniors' work ethic that will be missed.

"They have provided a great foundation for the younger players," he said. "The next couple of years we're going to have to develop some leadership because we don't have a lot of upperclassmen. They'll have to see themselves as big-time players and step on the court and keep us on that level." ■



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Home Stretch

Nebraska picks up commitment from quarterback as recruiting season winds down

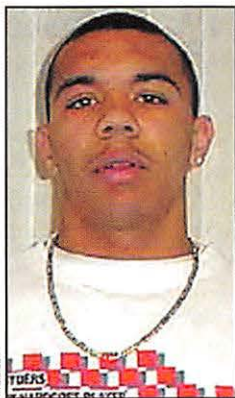
By Doug Horwich

Nebraska comes off of an Independence Bowl loss needing to fill roughly 11 more scholarship slots, and with less than a month remaining until signing day.

At the quarterback position, the Husker staff will look to get one more quarterback after receiving a commitment from Joe Dailey (6-foot, 205 pounds, 4.5 40-yard dash) from St. Peter's Prep in Jersey City, N.J.

The clear No. 1 target for Nebraska at this position is Tommy Zbikowski (5-11, 185, 4.5) from Buffalo Grove High School in Buffalo Grove, Ill. Zbikowski visited his three favorite schools in December but may take additional visits to Arizona State and Boston College before making a decision.

In all likelihood, Zbikowski will decide between Notre Dame and Nebraska. The Irish staff is recruiting



Joe Dailey, a quarterback from Jersey City, N.J., originally committed to Syracuse before changing his mind and committing to Nebraska.

him as a defensive back, while Nebraska is recruiting him as a quarterback. Zbikowski is open to playing either free safety or quarterback in college, so his decision may simply come down to the school with which he feels most comfortable.

Aside from Zbikowski, Nebraska's options have narrowed substantially. Quarterback/athlete Calvin Roberts (6-0, 180, 4.4) from Memorial High School in Port Arthur, Texas, apparently committed to the Huskers in late December, only to deny the commitment days later. Roberts remains in the picture and will likely decide between Nebraska, Oklahoma State and LSU. He visited Lincoln on the weekend of Dec. 20.

Other less probable targets at quarterback include Earl Everett (6-3, 210, 4.5) from South Sumter High

School in Webster, Fla. Everett is a star linebacker as well, and most schools are recruiting him for defense. Nebraska likes him as a quarterback, and if he chooses to play offense, NU will be his choice. Everett visited Lincoln during the weekend of Dec. 20 and has scheduled January visits to Florida, Florida State and Miami.

Another quarterback who visited Lincoln in December was Courtney Denson (6-1, 185, 4.4) from Central High School in Miami, Fla., Denson visited Lincoln the weekend of Dec. 13, despite having previously committed to attend Virginia Tech. He is scheduled to visit Auburn in January and will decide between those three schools. The most likely scenario, however, is that Denson will stick by his original commitment to the Hokies.

With three freshman I-backs on the roster in 2002, the Nebraska staff has not pursued a large number of running backs in this year's recruiting campaign. However, Clinton Polk (6-3, 195, 4.5) from Desert Vista High School in Phoenix, Ariz., definitely has the attention of the Husker coaching staff. Polk was to visit Lincoln the weekend of Jan. 10 and will decide between Nebraska, Arizona State, Oregon and Oregon State.

The Husker staff continues to pursue two tight ends who might be expected to contribute immediately in 2003.

The first is junior college player Eddie Whitaker (6-4, 250, 4.7) from Valley College in Los Angeles. Whitaker is a capable blocker and productive receiver who would be eligible to enroll immediately. He will decide between Nebraska and Maryland. Whitaker visited Lincoln the weekend of Dec. 13.

Another tight end who is receiving attention from Nebraska is J.B. Phillips (6-3, 240, 4.65) from Heritage High School in Colleyville, Texas. Phillips also visited Lincoln Dec. 13

Nebraska Commitments for 2003

Player	Hometown (school)	Ht.	Wt.	Pos.
Greg Austin	Cypress, Texas	6-2	275	OL
Andy Birkel	Lincoln (Southeast), Neb.	6-3	180	WR
Brett Byford	Hartselle, Ala.	6-4	290	OL
Steve Craver	Hurst, Texas	6-2	195	DB
Joe Dailey	Jersey City, N.J.	6-0	202	QB
Darren DeLone	Walnut, Calif.	6-5	320	OL
Corey McKeon	Naperville, Ill.	6-3	210	LB
Josh Mueller	Columbus (Lakeview), Neb.	6-7	250	TE
Wali Muhammad	Coffeyville, Kan.	6-1	235	DE
Trevor Neeman	Lincoln (Southeast), Neb.	6-3	225	TE
Kade Pittman	North Platte, Neb.	6-0	190	RB
Bo Ruud	Lincoln (Southeast), Neb.	6-3	210	LB
Brandon Teamer	Omaha (Central), Neb.	6-5	256	DT

and has a January visit scheduled to Oklahoma State. He will likely decide between those two schools.

With three offensive linemen already on board in this recruiting class, Nebraska is still after a few guard and tackle prospects around the country.

The Husker staff continues to wait for an answer from offensive tackle Joe Thomas (6-7, 270, 5.0) from Central High School in Brookfield, Wis. Thomas visited Lincoln in October and also made October visits to Colorado and Virginia Tech. He will likely make two additional visits in January before deciding.

Another possibility for Nebraska is offensive guard Jeremy Harrell (6-2, 285, 5.1) from Texarkana High School in Texarkana, Texas. Harrell was committed to UCLA prior to the coaching change, but now is looking at other options. He has visited Arizona State and has January visits scheduled with Nebraska and Oklahoma State. UCLA, Arkansas and Texas A&M remain in the picture.

Less likely offensive line possibilities for Nebraska include Sam Baker (6-5, 305, 5.2) from Tustin High School in Tustin, Calif., and John Mahaffey (6-5, 305, 5.2) from Lee High School in Tyler, Texas.

At the rush end position, the Nebraska staff is hoping to receive a commitment from Kyle Caldwell (6-3, 265, 4.9) from Saguaro High School in Scottsdale, Ariz. Caldwell was impressive at the recent Army All-Star Game on Jan. 5 and visited Lincoln the weekend of Dec. 13. He is also looking at Arizona State, Oregon and UCLA.

The Husker staff is also looking at junior college rush ends Doug Langenfield (6-3, 245, 4.6) from Reedley Community College in Reedley, Calif., and J.C. Braker (6-5, 245, 4.7) from Glendale College in Glendale, Ariz.

With a talented young group of defensive tackles already on campus, the Husker staff did not go after this position very hard this season. Brad Girtman (6-6, 300, 5.1) from Memorial High School in Houston and Donnell Livingston (6-2, 290, 5.0) from Sarasota High School in Sarasota, Fla., remain possibilities.

Nebraska is still looking at a bevy of linebackers around the country,

Huskers Seek Strong Finish

By Rick Shaw

After a disappointing season on the field in 2002 and a relatively slow start to the recruiting campaign, Nebraska coaches look to finish the final month of the recruiting season in strong fashion.

— Tommy Zbikowski, the 6-foot-1, 190-pound quarterback/defensive back from Buffalo Grove, Ill., is still trying to choose between offers from Notre Dame, Iowa, Nebraska and a host of other schools. According to sources close to Zbikowski, the decision will likely come down to a battle between the Fighting Irish and the Cornhuskers. Look for a decision from the Zbikowski camp by no earlier than mid-January and maybe not until signing day.

— Prep All-America defensive end Kyle Caldwell of Saguaro High School in Scottsdale, Ariz., joins Zbikowski on Nebraska's "most wanted" list as signing day draws near. The 6-4, 255-pound pass rushing specialist visited the Nebraska campus Dec. 13 and rated his experience higher than his previous visits to Oregon and Arizona State. However, the proximity of his home to Tempe and the fact that both of his parents are alumni of Arizona State weigh in favor of the Sun Devils. This battle should wage on until around mid-January, when Caldwell returns from a visit to UCLA.

— Nebraska is still looking hard at a few in-state prospects. Don't be surprised to see an additional commitment or two from inside the state's boundaries before signing day. Xavier Omon, a 5-11, 190-pound wingback/safety from Beatrice, Tierre Green, a 6-1, 185-pound running back/linebacker from Benson High in Omaha and Stuart Frazier, a 5-11, 230-pound fullback/linebacker from McCook are all serious candidates to receive offers.

— The commitment of offensive guard prospect Brett Byford to Nebraska coaches on New Year's Day was one of the highlights of the recruiting effort to date. The 6-4, 290-pound lineman from Hartselle, Ala., was offered a scholarship by the Nebraska staff last May. Since that time, he has seen an additional 15-plus offers from schools including Georgia Tech, South Carolina, Clemson and Oklahoma State. Rivals.com rates Byford as the nation's No. 18 offensive guard prospect.

"It is where God wanted me to be," Byford said. "I wanted to commit lots of times before, but I held back. I wanted to be sure that I was serving God's will. I am 100 percent sure that Nebraska is where I want to be."

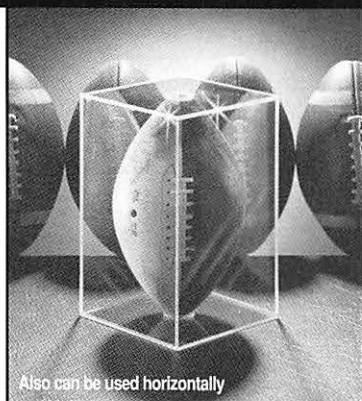
— Cory McKeon is another Blue-Chipper who joined the Nebraska recruiting class over the winter. The 6-3, 210-pound linebacker from North High in Naperville, Ill., chose the Huskers over offers from Illinois, Purdue, South Carolina, Indiana, Wisconsin and others. He was one of just four prepsters from Illinois chosen to play in the U.S. Army All-American Bowl in San Antonio on Jan. 5.

McKeon said he is versatile and can play any of the three linebacker positions. "I have been clocked in the 40-yard dash as fast as 4.3 seconds, so I bring a lot of speed and quickness to the game. I'm a solid commitment to Nebraska and will not take any further visits." ■

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including Lance Broadus (6-2, 225, 4.5) from Taft High School in Woodland Hills, Calif., Larry Edwards (6-2, 225, 4.5) from Wharton High School in Tampa, Fla., Marquis McBeath (6-1, 215, 4.6) from Moss Point High School in Moss Point, Miss., and Terre Green (6-1, 190, 4.5) from Omaha Benson High School.

Edwards had a great visit to Lincoln, but a number of SEC and ACC schools are also in the mix. Green, the cousin of ex-Husker star Ahman Green, may be in line to receive a late offer and would likely commit if offered. Broadus and McBeath remain outside possibilities.

Cornerback is perhaps the most critical position in this recruiting season, and a large number of prospects are being targeted for 2-3 desired commitments. Among the top candidates is junior college corner Donald DeFrاند (6-0, 175, 4.4) from Dodge City Community College in Dodge City, Kan. DeFrاند will choose between Nebraska, Texas Tech, Kansas State and Tennessee.

Another strong possibility at the corner position is Adrian Turner (5-10, 185, 4.5) from Terrell High School

in Terrell, Texas. Turner will choose between Nebraska, Arkansas, TCU and Louisiana Tech. Both DeFrاند and Turner visited Lincoln in November.

Nebraska is also pursuing commitments from high school cornerbacks Titus Brothers (5-11, 190, 4.5) from Judson High School in Converse, Texas, Mike Jenkins (5-11, 180, 4.4) from Southeast High School in Bradenton, Fla., and Eddie Hunter (5-8, 175, 4.4) from Inglewood High School in Inglewood, Calif. Hunter currently has Nebraska in the lead for his commitment, while the Huskers trail slightly for both Brothers and Jenkins.

In addition to DeFrاند, the Husker staff has taken a look at junior college cornerbacks Lionel Green (6-1, 185, 4.4) from Reedley College, Brian Staley (5-10, 185, 4.4) from Georgia Military College in Milledgeville, Ga., Michael Smith (5-10, 170, 4.4) from Pima College in Tucson, Ariz., and Reynaldo Hill (6-1, 185, 4.4) from Dodge City. Green and Smith are serious possibilities, while Staley and Hill currently favor other programs. ■

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CROSSWORD

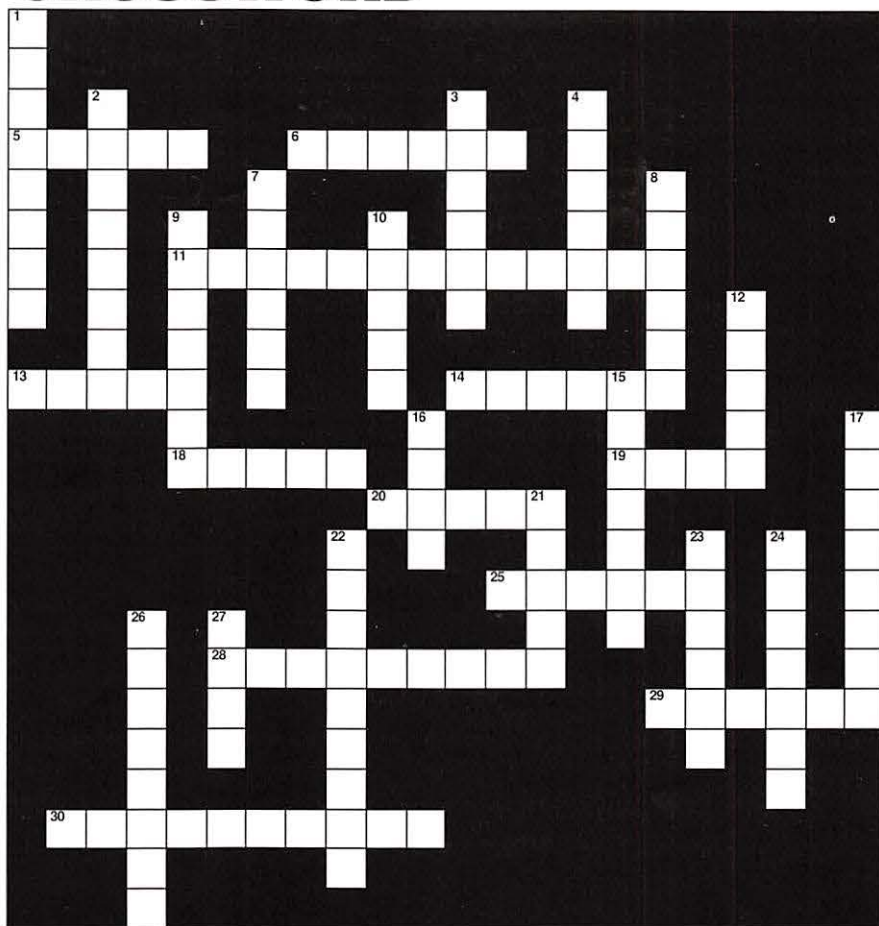
ACROSS

- 5 NU quarterback expected to miss spring practice
- 6 2002 Heisman Trophy winner
- 11 NU's opening opponent in 2003
- 13 2001 national champion
- 14 Missed Independence Bowl because of illness
- 18 Scored NU's last TD vs. Mississippi
- 19 Frank Solich's seasons as head coach
- 20 Ex-Husker who helped coach for Independence Bowl
- 25 2001 Heisman Trophy winner
- 28 2002 national champion
- 29 Threw pass on fake field goal vs. Mississippi
- 30 NU cornerback who played as true freshman

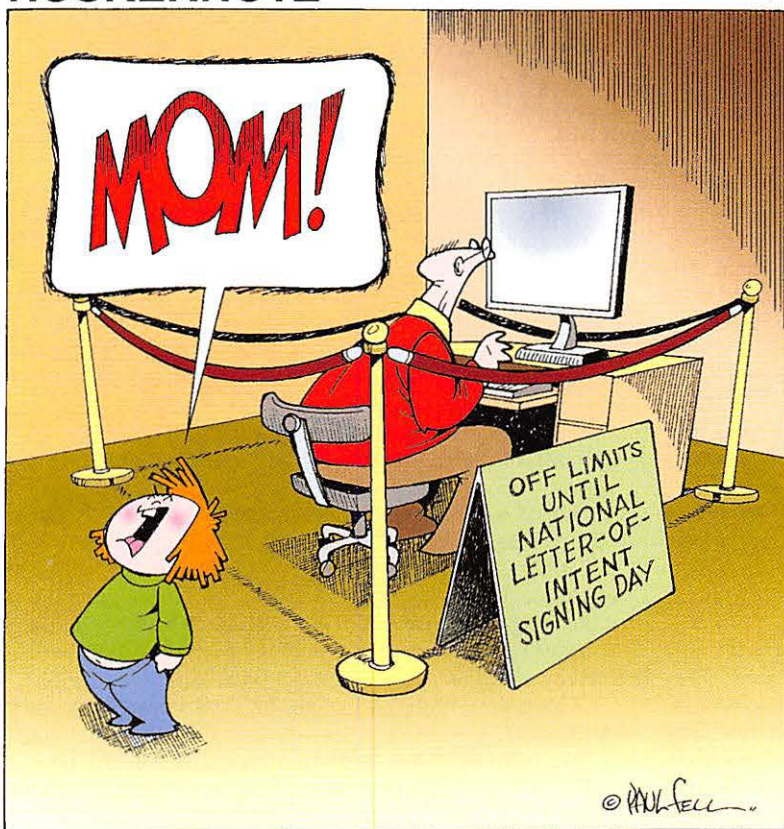
DOWN

- 1 NU's leading rusher vs. Mississippi
- 2 2002 Big 12 champion
- 3 Scored NU's first TD vs. Mississippi
- 4 NU's leader in sacks in 2002
- 7 NU's new defensive coordinator
- 8 Matt Herian's hometown
- 9 NU tight end who missed bowl game with injury
- 10 NU I-back who played as true freshman
- 12 Former NU athletic director
- 15 Ex-Husker who punts for the San Francisco 49ers
- 16 NU's leading rusher in 2002
- 17 NU's leading tackler in 2002
- 21 Number of Josh Brown field goals vs. Mississippi
- 22 NU's leader in pancake blocks in 2002
- 23 NU's leading receiver in 2002
- 24 NU rover who blocked three punts in 2002
- 26 NU's new athletic director
- 27 Former NU defensive coordinator

Answers in March issue



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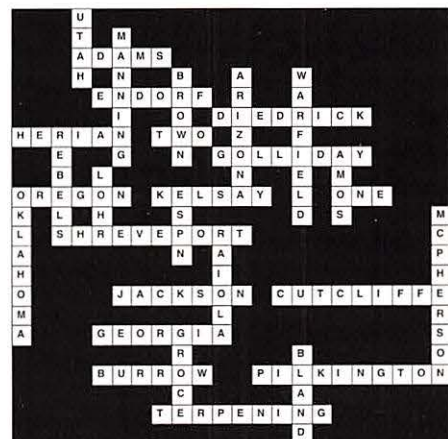
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Passionate Statement

Athletic Director Pederson's sincerity apparent from the start



Mike BABCOCK

ANY DOUBT that Steve Pederson is what the Nebraska athletic department needs right now should have been dispelled during his remarks immediately following Chancellor Harvey Perlman's introduction at a news conference in the Don Bryant Media Center in late December.

Such remarks, by their nature, are often predictable if not perfunctory, a thank you or two, some introductions and then enthusiastic assurances that the future will be bright.

My high school speech class, like yours, provided a pattern, which I couldn't master.

My efforts in speech class always turned into poor approximations of stand-up comedians popular at the time, Bob Newhart in particular, eliciting occasional laughter from the instructor.

"Funny," he would write on the evaluation sheet, "C-minus" — or "D-plus."

Pederson fared much better in speech class, in my guess. He is an accomplished motivational speaker, transforming a potentially mundane introduction into a passionate mission statement.

That is a skill, however, which doesn't always depend on substance in order to be convincing. An effective speaker, like a master magician, has the ability to create an illusion.

Pederson wasn't creating an illusion, however. His sincerity was apparent a minute or two into his remarks, as he was making the aforementioned obligatory introductions. "The best thing that ever happened in my life, happened at the University of Nebraska. I met Tami," he said of his wife.

She was Tami Osborne then, and when she was a student, often got phone calls directed at Coach Tom Osborne because she was listed in the phone directory as "T Osborne."

They are not related. But it's an ironic, and appropriate, bit of trivia.

Anyway, Steve introduced Tami, who sat in the front row with their children, Mark (19), Kari (16) and Kristin (13), and described her as "the most talented member of our family."

Tami plays the violin, professionally. She has played with symphony orchestras in Pittsburgh, Knoxville, Omaha and Lincoln and performs with the Virtuosi String Ensemble.

She founded the Fox Chapel Suzuki Violinists, a studio at which she teaches.

She is "my greatest adviser, my greatest supporter and my greatest friend," Steve said.

The emotion came to the surface as he said those words.

I've known Steve since I was new at the Lincoln newspapers and he was working in the sports information office, showing the intelligence and the drive that have allowed him to rise to a place of national prominence among intercollegiate athletic directors at age 45.

He has been a friend, and maybe I should have disclosed my personal bias earlier. But having known him for more

than 20 years, I could see in the instant he faltered the sincerity that will enable him to succeed in massing the support needed to get the athletic department back on track.

Even in his early 20s, Pederson had the respect of those with whom he worked — the late Frank Sevigne, the men's track and field coach, for example. Sevigne could be particularly difficult to deal with if you hadn't earned his trust by demonstrating more than a cursory interest in his sport.

Pederson took that interest, and did a great impersonation of Sevigne, as well as of other athletic department personnel for whom he had great affection, evidence of his quick wit and imagination.

That wit and imagination served him well as Nebraska's football recruiting coordinator (1982-86) and then as associate athletic director and director of football operations (1994-96).

He is a great storyteller, a reflection of his attention to detail. He could write a book recounting his experiences as recruiting coordinator at Nebraska, Ohio State and Tennessee.

A prospective Cornhusker straggled into his office on a Saturday morning before a recruiting breakfast and asked, politely, if he could be assigned a different recruiting host.

His disheveled condition was a result of being punched out the previous night by the player who had been his host because that player thought he was flirting with the player's girlfriend.

The recruit went elsewhere. And the player no longer served as a host.

Pederson earned the respect of Tom Osborne, whom he counseled in dealing with the media, encouraging Osborne to be proactive in potentially difficult public relations situations.

Osborne's influence in his return is his best endorsement.

Nothing more needs to be said, really. But if that isn't sufficient reason for optimism, consider the image he sustained throughout the introductory news conference. "It's an exciting day for our whole family," Pederson said.

Many family members were on hand to share in the moment. He is from North Platte, Tami from Omaha. "They've traveled with us everywhere we've gone and been supportive of what we're doing," he said. "Now the drive gets a little easier for them, and I think they're grateful."

Family would seem an appropriate metaphor for the athletic department and, by extension, its fans. Pederson will make it work, by force of will, by character and by example.

It has to work at the personal level first. And obviously it does.

"I love you, Honey," he said to Tami before introducing his children.

"We have the three best children in the world," he said.

If you know him, you know he meant those things. ■



Steve Pederson was associate athletic director from 1994-96.

Mike Babcock is a former sports columnist for the Lincoln Journal Star. He has covered Nebraska football for more than 20 years. Mike can be reached at MumblyDog@aol.com or P.O. Box 6782, Lincoln, NE 68506.

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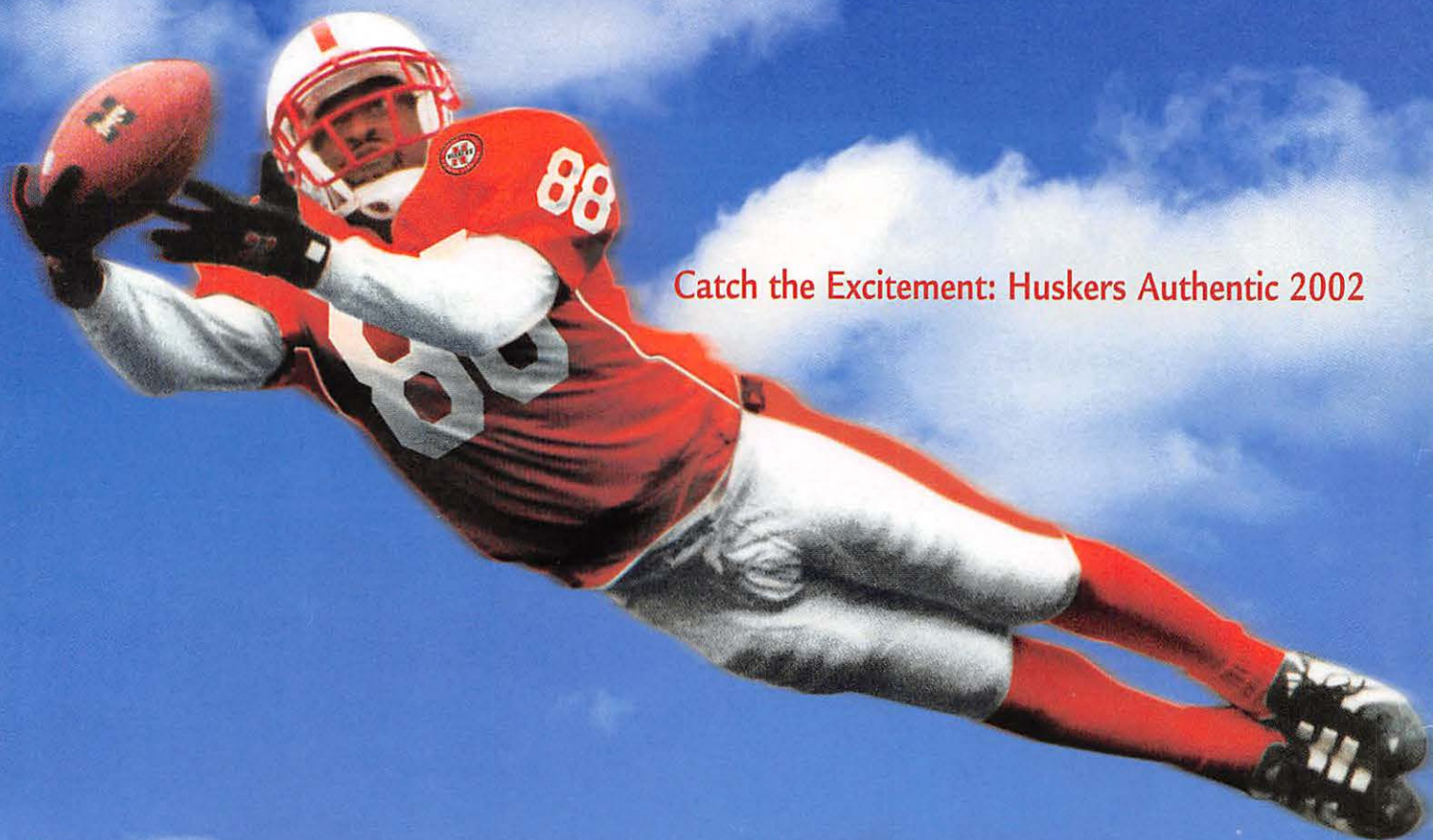


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